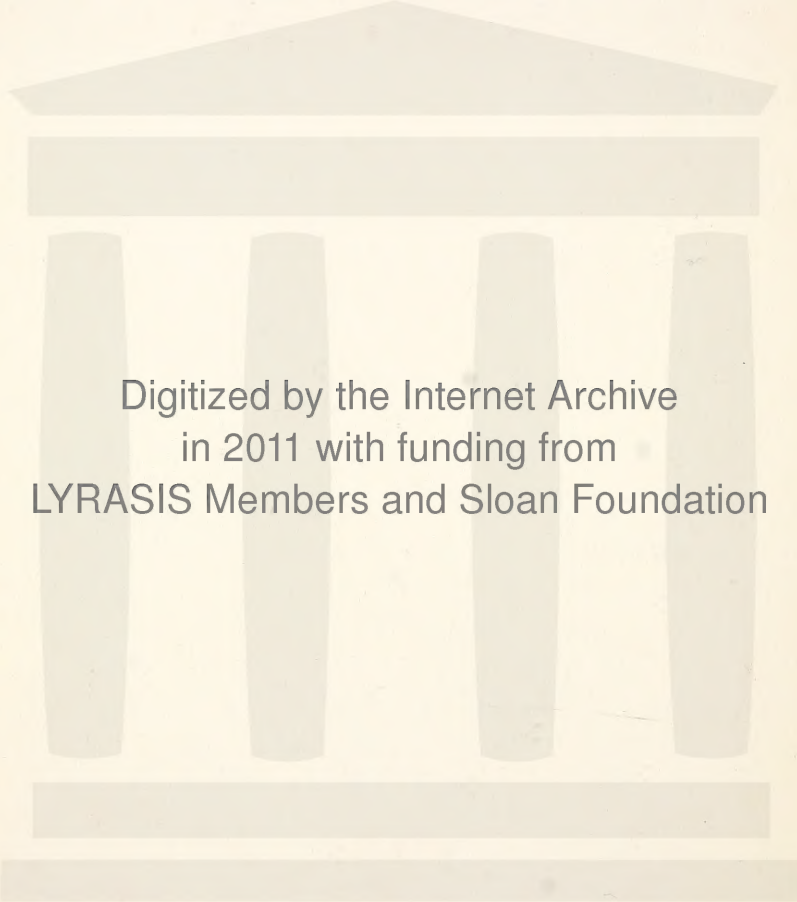


# *Spiritans Today*



*Cor unum  
et  
anima una*



Digitized by the Internet Archive  
in 2011 with funding from  
LYRASIS Members and Sloan Foundation





# SPIRITAN COMMUNITY

“TO BRING THE APOSTOLIC LIFE — FOR WHICH SPIRITAN LIFE IS INTENDED — TO ITS PERFECTION, TO ASSURE THE CONTINUANCE AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE WORKS IN WHICH IT ENGAGES AND TO FOSTER THE HOLINESS OF ITS MEMBERS, THE CONGREGATION HAS ADOPTED LIFE IN COMMUNITY AS ITS FOUNDING PRINCIPLE ”.

François Libermann  
(N.D. X, 454)

**Spiritan Rule of Life, N. 27.**



# CONTENTS

Foreword: An Issue on our Spiritan Community — Spiritan Research and Animation Center . . . . .	7
Preface: Rev. Fr Pierre Haas, Superior General . . . . .	9

## A SURVEY OF COMMUNITY LIFE IN THE CONGREGATION

I - The nature of the survey . . . . .	11
II - Some comments on the survey . . . . .	11
III - Variety of Community Life-Styles: some examples . . . . .	14

## COMMUNITY IN THE SPIRITAN TRADITION

I - Claude François Poullart des Places . . . . .	21
II - Francis Libermann . . . . .	21
III - Chapter Documents and New Rule of Life . . . . .	30

## COMMUNITY IN THE HUMAN SCIENCES

I - Community and Anthropology . . . . .	37
II - Community and Psychology . . . . .	39
III - Community and Sociology . . . . .	42

## COMMUNITY IN THE THEOLOGY OF VATICAN II

I - Church — Communion . . . . .	45
II - Religious life and Religious Community . . . . .	48
III - Community and Mission . . . . .	50



## GUIDELINES FOR COMMUNITY RENEWAL

Maxims and Questions . . . . .	55
--------------------------------	----

## INSTRUMENTS FOR COMMUNITY RENEWAL

I. <i>In View of the Apostolate</i> . . . . .	61
1. "Planning the Apostolate" community Retreat . . . . .	61
2. Reading "the Signs of the Times" . . . . .	63
3. A Method of Planning and Programming . . . . .	66
II. <i>Instruments for Communication</i> . . . . .	69
4. The Means of Information . . . . .	69
5. The Networks of Communication . . . . .	71
III. <i>Assessment of Participation, Listening and Re-acting in Community</i> . . . . .	73
6. The responsibility of Members in the life of their Community . . . . .	74
7. Learning to listen . . . . .	75
8. Assessment of the attitudes of the Members of the Community . . . . .	77
IV. <i>Discernment</i> . . . . .	78
9. Community Discernment . . . . .	78
10. A review of Community life . . . . .	81
11. The morale of a Community . . . . .	84
12. The Health and Sickness of a Community . . . . .	86
V. <i>The Religious Dimension</i> . . . . .	87
13. Sharing the Word of God . . . . .	87
14. Sharing lived experience . . . . .	90
15. "Dialogue, the way to communion" — A community retreat . . . . .	92
16. A community celebration of Reconciliation . . . . .	94

# CONTENTS

5

VI. <i>The Regional Community</i> . . . . .	95
17. Concrete conditions for the Existence and Life of a Regional Community . . . . .	95
VII. <i>The Community Project</i> . . . . .	97
18. A Community Project Grid . . . . .	97
Conclusion. — Our Spiritan Apostolic Community . . . . .	101





## FOREWORD

### AN ISSUE ON OUR SPIRITAN COMMUNITY

A manual for community renewal, entitled "EXPERIENCING COMMUNITY", was presented at the 1986 General Chapter by the then General Council. It is the fruit of research on Community Life, which the 1980 General Chapter had asked to have done. The work had been carried out, under the direction of Fr. Thomas M. Farrelly, by the Generalate Planning Service with a COMMUNITY LIFE COMMISSION on which Fr. François Créac'h played a great part. It consists of 240 pages, in a photocopied format.

The present issue of SPIRITANS TODAY (N. 5) on SPIRITAN COMMUNITY treats the essential parts of this work, emphasizing missionary thinking and using Father Libermann's anthology on Community which is one of the jewels of our Spiritan literature. It refers the reader to this manual "EXPERIENCING COMMUNITY" for further material to serve the process of Community renewal, which is one of the first animation priorities confided by the Chapter of 1986 to the incoming General Council.

Briefly, it may be described as containing three elements: sources, guidelines and instruments. The first part presents the results of research into sources which include our Spiritan tradition, contributions from the human sciences and the theology of Vatican II. The guidelines follow from that; the third part contains a set of instruments, i.e. suggested methods for activities and experiences, to assist the process of putting the guidelines into effect. An effort is made to balance the pages of practice with those of theory. A survey in the Congregation dating from 1984 throws light on the life of our communities.

Confreres who are very markedly different in their cultures will be reading this issue on SPIRITAN COMMUNITY: that a serious effort at adaptation is needed should go without saying. It is published in English, French and Portuguese. It comes out already behind schedule, having been held up until the Rule of Life should have gone to

press: frequently it quotes the Rule; always it follows the Rule's core ideas. . .

A great debt of gratitude is owed to Fr. Tony Geoghegan, now working in formation in Ireland, who made a major contribution to this issue, and to Fr. Myles Fay, now serving with the East African Foundation, who contributed to its preparation.

Thanks also to Fr. François Nicolas and Fr. James Okoye, of the General Council, for reading over the final draft, and, for a few final translations, Fr. Vincent O'Grady.

The best possible thanks for all who have had a hand in this work would be to watch the SPIRITAN APOSTOLIC COMMUNITY becoming more and more truly itself, by the grace of the Holy Spirit and the intercession of Mary's Immaculate Heart!

**Alphonse Gilbert, CSSp.**  
**Spiritan Research and Animation Center**  
**Clivo di Cinna, 195, 00136 ROMA**



## PREFACE

by Rev. Fr Pierre Haas, Superior General

One of a team of three confreres, who was just going to take up a different posting, having served several years in a city centre mission, had this said to him by the head catechist: “Your team set up living Christian communities, you opened more than a few places of prayer, you have been very close to us through frequent family visiting, especially with the poor . . .” After this the priest was expecting to be congratulated for all the work done but the catechist added: “in the end, however, what stays in our minds about your group will be your team spirit, your living community. Now I can say it out to you, because you are going away; sometimes we did try to come between you, playing one off against the other, but we never could succeed”.

Such testimonials to the Spiritan community life exist, lots of them, indeed. But, let’s be blunt about the truth, there is different evidence — evidence of lack of accord, of dividedness, of individualism in this community or that. Each of us certainly has had the experience of community that succeeded and was a source of happiness and apostolic drive but the experience, too, of a less easy community, with an unpleasant atmosphere. One of these experiences might lead us to say: “I can’t imagine living without being in community” or the other to say: “Community? Yes, but not like what I’ve just been through!”

You will just have received the Spiritan Rule of Life. Its number 27 repeats, as it introduces the chapter on Community, the key text of Venerable Libermann on Community, taken from the Rule of 1849:

**‘To bring the apostolic life — for which Spiritan life is intended — to its perfection, to assure the continuance and the development of the works in which it engages and to foster the holiness of its members, the Congregation has adopted life in community as its founding principle. Its members shall all live in community at all times’ (Rule of 1849. ND X, 454).**

We are, every one of us, involved in this community life, whatever we may already have experienced or are now living, each is challenged



to authenticate the truth of his own community life in the light both of those words and the whole of this third Chapter.

Of course, circumstances differ, some of us are living in local Spiritan community, others by reason of the demands the mission makes or for another cause are living in community with people who are not Spiritans, others live on their own. What the Rule is calling for is that these confreres should be attached to a local community or should be grouped as a regional community.

This number 5 of "Spiritans Today" will serve as a precious guide to the building up of true Spiritan community, to be at the service of the apostolic life in all the various circumstances, ministries and cultural situations.

**"In keeping with our ideal of a life that is both fraternal and apostolic, we take for our motto the words used to describe the early Christian communities: 'One heart and one soul'" (cf Acts 4 : 32). (Rule, n. 7)**

May the Holy Spirit help us to bring into being communities such as will bear witness to this ideal.

Pierre HAAS, C.S.Sp.

# A SURVEY OF COMMUNITY LIFE IN THE CONGREGATION

## I - THE NATURE OF THE SURVEY

The survey was conducted in 1984 by means of a questionnaire based on the texts of the recent general chapters, which contain guidelines for community life renewal adopted by the whole Congregation.

The number of communities to be surveyed, from one to four, was allocated to each circumscription according to its size, and the choice of the communities was left to the principal superior and his council.

The survey has certain limitations, one of which is that it is based on a selected sample, not on a random sample, so that the responding communities may not be truly representative of the Congregation. Another limitation is the fact that the ratio of responding communities was only 45% of the 125 communities selected in the sample. Nevertheless, the survey has a value as a descriptive study of a selected number of different kinds of Spiritan communities on five continents.

## II - SOME COMMENTS ON THE SURVEY

### 1 - COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENTS AND CHARACTERISTICS

The *environments* in which the communities live and work provide a great variety of cultural, socio-economic and political systems, within which a variety of *apostolates* is carried on. These include pastoral activity (30 communities), formation (11), education (6), animation (4) and administration (2). And it must be noted that in 34% of the communities the members do not all exercise the same apostolate. Processes designed for community living must be adaptable to interaction with these varied environments and apostolates.

The impression of great variety is increased when account is taken of the internal characteristics of the responding communities. There were 26 "local" communities, of which 6 were Formation communities, and 29 "regional" communities. To this variety in *types of community*, may be added the variety in the *size* of the communities, which ranged from 2 to 44 members (but 52% had less than 6 members). The *average age* of the members ranges from 23 to 68 years, with half the communities reporting an average age below 58 years. This variety complicates the task of designing a community life renewal process.

## 2 – COMMUNITY APOSTOLATE

**N.B. Each *italicized* expression in this chapter is a title in the questionnaire Communities were asked to reply to.**

Concerning the community apostolic activities the highest priority has been given to *Sharing Responsibility and Teamwork* and *Adaptation to local Conditions*. Average ranking has been given by the responding communities to: *Support for Missionary Vocations*, *Solidarity with the People* and *Involvement in the Local Church*. A low priority is given to *Disengagement and Retraining*.

## 3 – COMMUNITY LIFE

In the questionnaire there were eight questions dealing with community life, that is, with interactions within the community. The replies to these questions give the following sequence to a descending order of frequency of activities: *Personal Development*, *Living Fraternally*, *Building Community*, *Interpersonal Relations*, *Interpersonal Relations and the Evangelical Counsels*, *Prayer in common*, *Conflict and Reconciliation*, and *Formation for Community*.

The last two fall well below the overall average.



## 4 - APPARENT NEEDS

Certain needs of the communities seem to have been revealed in the survey. A number of needs are centred on the phenomenon of change in the Church and in the world.

Even though *Awareness of Change* in the Church and in the world can hardly be avoided these days, responding communities have given it a low priority in terms of activities, such as study, discussions, courses or retreats, devoted to renewal; or activities involving questioning ourselves, widening our criteria, or renewing our commitment. In fact it comes second last in the list of community apostolic activities, although the 1974 General Chapter reminds us that: "Spiritans should keep themselves aware of change, of the evolution in the world and in the Church" (GA 81). It would seem too from the survey that more attention is given to *analysing change* than to *questioning ourselves*.

The same 1974 Chapter notes that "the contemporary pace of change often means that a confrere has to abandon a work to which he has become accustomed" (GA 91). It goes on to suggest several ways of helping such a confrere, among which four were used in the questionnaire: opportunity for retraining; opportunity for spiritual renewal; help to find other work; integrate into another community. Yet the topic of *Disengagement and Retraining* occupies the lowest place in the activities of the responding communities.

Another area of need seems to have been revealed by the question on *Conflict and Reconciliation*. The question was based on passages from the 1974 and 1980 General Chapters, and was worded as follows: "Profound changes, such as those initiated by Vatican II, are apt to cause insecurity and fear leading to tension and conflict in communities" (GA 86-90; SL 92).

Then the communities were asked to name activities for handling tension. Of these, *Analysis of Tensions* was the most frequently engaged in, whereas *Search for a Common Solution* (which should logically follow) was much less frequently used. *Open to the Local Environment* received very few mentions, even though the 1974 General Chapter suggested that: "Tensions within a community can be lessened by opening it up to contact with other institutes, with other people and, in a general way, with the local environment" (GA 89).

Another seeming need lies in the area of *Dialogue with non-Christian Religions*. Only one community, and that in a first evangelization situation, admitted to activities such as: allowing the religious values

of the people to challenge our beliefs, taking part in traditional religious ceremonies, and praying daily with non-Christians. However, in the survey, several mentions were made of integrating traditional religious values into the liturgy.

From the survey it also appears that activities connected with *solidarity with the aspirations of the people* have a low priority in comparison with those concerning cultural values, and economic and social realities.

## 5 - EXISTING PROCESSES

The survey also reveals the *strengths* of the responding communities, based on processes already being by them. The theme which shows the highest overall frequency of activities is *Personal Development*. This is balanced by the theme of *Responsibility and Teamwork*, which has the second highest overall frequency. Next comes *Prayer in Common*, and then *Adaptation to Local Conditions*. Thus, the themes which get top priority are well balanced between community apostolate and community living.

In the survey high scores are attained by the themes of *Spiritual Development*, *Sharing Joys*, *Hospitality*, and *Studying the Situation*. This indicates that the kind of processes favoured by the responding communities are those that support a joyful spirituality and an outgoing and well-organized apostolate.

Since, at the more detailed level of collective activities, the most frequently mentioned activity is *the meeting*, it is likely that improved processes for meetings would be helpful to communities.

## III - VARIETY OF COMMUNITY LIFE-STYLES: SOME EXAMPLES

In their replies to the questionnaire, some confreres have enlarged upon the description of their community life-style. Here we have gathered some samples, which are particularly revealing of the variety of our Spiritan communities: in Europe, in Latin America, and in Africa.

1) This is a **missionary animation "community" in Europe**, made up of two confreres.

"Since there are only two of us in the community, everything is examined, analysed, decided, planned, revised and corrected together.

We accept each other's different *bio-rhythms* (sleep, times for discussion, meals, times of prayer. . .). In carrying out our work as educators, there is always *preliminary consultation* and the intention to never neutralize each other.

Mutual concession from the beginning: we respect each other's different *temperaments* and characters, and make conscious *use* of our differences for the sake of the effectiveness of our ministry to the young.

For example, in a group one challenges, the other calms (in general)".

2) This is a **regional community in Paraguay**. There are indications which imply that this community makes a genuine effort to read the signs of the times and to study popular culture:

- "Demythologizing and evangelizing popular religiousness.

A sort of stereotyped image is made of the priest from which it is hard to escape: live alongside the people without any real sharing, because they see the priest as a being apart.

Hospitality: badly received if one tries to exercise it, taking into account the idea they have of the priest. The people come to see the priest as best they can and whenever they want.

- The people's aspiration to a more decent life, to greater justice in the sharing out of the land.

- Basic Communities: we help them to organize themselves and to become masters of their own fate".

3) A **Latin American community** explains the links it has with its religious and social environment: "We are very much dictated by the conditions in which we live and work. These conditions make physical development very difficult. Conditions are: high noise level, pollution, open sewers and rubbish dump beside the house, working with poor deprived people, violence, unemployment, 230% inflation in one year.

Vatican II accepted by religious community, tension is caused by those, outside the religious community, who strive to follow an out-



moded pastoral approach and those who use an extreme pastoral approach. We attempt to dialogue with such people.

Living in a deprived area, we try by conscientization to help people to face the situation.

We encourage participation in both secular and Church groups to improve health and sanitary conditions. . . We help people in basic Christian communities to clarify their aspirations and form concrete proposals to achieve those aspirations.

We visit homes and share their food and drink. The people feel free to visit our houses and are welcome to share our food and drink. Due to our isolated situation, we are often host to overnight guests who would otherwise have difficulty in finding accommodations.

We work with laity, religious and priests at all levels: diocesan, regional, parish, and basic community.

We do all these (study of the situation, projects, methods. . .) at all levels: diocesan, regional, parochial, ecclesial community (i.e. basic community) and religious community levels”.

4) How should we plan and evaluate? Here is an example from a **community in North America.**

“*Yearly Planning and Evaluation.* In broad outline, planning for the year consists in a period of about four days spent together as a community. Usually, we have our meeting in another Spiritan house for the sake of a change of air and to make of our time together a special occasion for reflecting on the year just past, to make space for the newly arrived, to work together in preparing the year ahead and to go out and enjoy ourselves freely.

*Concretely*, during these four days, we share our expectations for the coming year, while evaluating the year just past. Thanks to this serious evaluation and to the help we give one another in deciding on the most realistic expectations, the year is well prepared. The evaluations we make during these days of integration serve this purpose. We also express to one another our individual charisms to enrich the community and to encourage us to develop them. We even arrange a new set of priorities for the house and for our commitments so as to more fully integrate the new-comers and to respond more fairly to the immediate needs of the new community. It is as well a way of giving ourselves a common objective and of showing solidarity with one another.

Of course, the community helps each one to choose one or several commitments which take account of the expectations of each and of

the priorities of the house. These commitments are undertaken, as far as possible, in harmony with the views of the Congregation. We make out a timetable, in which we try to find a balance between our prayer life, our studies, and our commitments. We arrange a suitable time for making out the budget”.

5) A **formation community in North America** gives us a typical example of a weekly community meeting.

“We undertake to meet together one evening every week. This evening is an absolute priority for each of us.

Once the group is seated, we start with a short spontaneous prayer, or we sing a hymn, or we remain in silence for a moment. By this means we offer the sharing we are about to have to the love of God, and we express once more our desire to grow in this love.

Then comes the time for sharing our experiences. Each one is invited to share with the others something important to him: a precise experience during the past week, an awareness, a preoccupation, a tension or conflict that has been experienced, a joy, etc. It can be one of many things, and more or less lengthy, provided it is in the line of “telling it as it really is”. It is however essential that whoever is doing the sharing be involved in what he is saying, and in touch with his feelings, among other ways, by expressing himself in the first person. He tries not to theorize about the happening which he is recounting, but to say rather what the event meant for him.

Each one is free to make his contribution whenever he wants. Those on the receiving end try to understand and welcome what is said by listening attentively. They try not to interrupt the speaker. They respect his silences and hesitations.

When everyone has finished, several things can happen, according to the substance of what has gone on. A thanksgiving prayer or a prayer of intercession might be said, or there might be a discussion on a particular point or a moment of relaxation. Sometimes the sharing might give rise to a meeting of two by themselves to clear up something.

Usually, we end up by having a snack together”.

6) An **African confrere** analyses one of the numerous aspects of the necessary *inculturation of community in Africa*.

“Rather than by his exact *geographical and temporal co-ordinates* (born on... at... son of... and of...), the African is defined, as was the Semite at the time of Christ, by his *social co-ordinates*, by his

attachment to a group, by his "roots" in a history... The African is son of... nephew of... brother of... of the tribe of... Whence the importance of *genealogies*, even in the case of Jesus... The call name of the African on the drum, the "NDAN" in ewondo, the language of the South-Camerouns, identifies precisely each individual by his connections, his roots, the events which marked his birth...

An outstanding trait of African culture is that it is all-embracing and forms a whole. It is not broken up, specialized, forming dichotomies.

The individual finds in the enlarged family the satisfaction of all his aspirations. He can count completely on his clan-community for the protection and development of his life. His clan-community can in return count on him to protect and promote the total collective life. The clan is all the more demanding in this regard in that *it is everything for him*. Whence the importance of the *traditional Initiation* in which this communitarian ethic is inculcated.

The organic system of sharing, after the manner of inter-connected containers, obliges the rich person in Africa to distribute his gifts generously. *To distribute*, to give generously, was the enviable quality of the African "kalos kagathos". It was a supreme shame to be classed as miserly, stingy, calculating. There were even competitions in generosity between villages. In all that lies the source of the famous "African hospitality" that everyone praises and wishes to be perpetuated.

The African aspired to possessing a lot *to be able to give a lot!*

In most African cultures, this society of continuous sharing is now unfortunately only a nostalgic memory of the past. The monetary economy has come, along with its attendant individualism.

Now, religious community, which proposes to revive the letter and the spirit of the primitive Christian communities (Acts 2, 42-47), is making its appearance just at the right moment to offer a chance to the African to rediscover, purified and at a higher level, the traditional values that have been upset by the clash of cultures. This chance for African people to reach complete fulfilment must not be compromised by a narrow-minded theology. Did not Jesus say: "I have not come to destroy, but to fulfil!"? (Mt. 5, 17)

**7) A community of missionaries in Africa** presents its own community project.

"It is imperative to mention here that our work situation is that of working with a very poor group of people. These people are seminomadic cattle herders. Social development programs are extremely dif-



ficult with this sparse and widely scattered population which migrates often in search of grass and water. So our principal activity is the development and implementation of a first evangelization program.

We feel that over the years together we have developed from a very work-oriented approach to life to a more person and community-oriented outlook. This has resulted in the comparatively recent adoption of regular community liturgies, days of celebration and relaxation together, community days of prayer and reflection. We feel these activities continue to be of mutual benefit to each one personally and to the work we do.

- Twice weekly spiritual reading together consisting of a one-hour period each time.

- Day of prayer-reflection every two months.

- Regular liturgies, some with the local community, others with only intra-community (Spiritans and Sisters) participation.

- Monthly accounting of money spent by each member.

This gives a chance for regular evaluation of our use of money. Our aim in the use of money is to help people.

We feel that a joint evaluation of how money is given, loaned or otherwise used is necessary to alleviate community tensions and strengthen unity.

- There are regular times for morning, evening and night prayer.

At night prayer we have each night a reading from Libermann's thoughts: **YOU HAVE LAID YOUR HAND ON ME**, of Fr. Gilbert.

- Twice a week spiritual reading is done in the chapel, which is the place most conducive to quiet and recollection.

- Each Wednesday we have a day of fasting".

## Conclusion

Several salient features of these few examples are clear: some emphasize religious community; others, ecclesial communities; still others harmonize both trends. The Spiritan community comes across as genuinely apostolic: a community for Mission and a community for the individual; a community of work and a community of life, sharing what one is as well as what one does, with the two strands closely knit. . . Finally, notice culture as a consideration; no one can doubt the necessity of paying particular attention to it. . .



# COMMUNITY IN THE SPIRITAN TRADITION

## I - CLAUDE-FRANCIS POUILLART DES PLACES

At the very beginning, in the first years of the 18th century, Claude-Francis Poullart des Places gathered together a group of poor “scholars” whose means were not sufficient to allow them to become priests. **In 1703, they set up a community of life, of prayer, and of study, consecrated to the Holy Spirit and to the Immaculate Virgin, directed towards the service of the poor and towards the lowliest ministries, including that of the foreign Missions.** We know, from the Regulations of the Holy Ghost Congregation (for it was without the name because of royal legislation at the time), **the style of poverty, of mutual service, and of fraternity that characterized it.** Even though it left no elaborate texts on the subject, **the primitive Spiritan community remains for us a faithful witness to a kind of life based on the imitation of Christ, who was “consecrated by the Spirit and sent to the poorest”** (this was the biblical text that inspired the first consecration) **and on the model of the first community of the apostles around Jesus.** The educators of the Spiritans, the Placists, who constitute the authentic nucleus of the Congregation, and who are the true representatives of the spirit of the founder, made their Seminary one of the best of the period, noted for the good spiritual and intellectual formation that it gave, and for its fidelity to the Roman Pontiff. We know that, at the time when the fusion of this Congregation with that of the Holy Heart of Mary, which took place in 1848, was in preparation, eminent intellectuals among the ecclesiastics of France were staying at the Seminary, which subsequently were to come under the spiritual influence of Francis Libermann.

## II - FRANCIS LIBERMANN

From the beginning, Fr Libermann laid down in the Provisional Rule of the Congregation of the Holy Heart of Mary, compiled in



1840, the essential elements of the community life of his missionaries, stressing both its vital necessity and its fecundity. Subsequently, after the fusion, in his capacity as Superior General of the Congregation of the Holy Ghost and of the Holy Heart of Mary, he wrote the celebrated Regulations of 1849, inspired in great part by the Provisional Rule. Here, long chapters on the purpose and spirit of community life express, as clearly as possible, a dominant feature of Spiritan life. The experience of eight years had confirmed his views concerning this essential aspect of our vocation.

The same conviction is to be found in the famous Memorandum to the Propaganda of 1840, in which he presents community life as a vital condition for the success of his undertaking.

Through a certain number of letters to missionaries or to mission communities, in the supervision of formation communities which he animated at La Neuville or at Notre-Dame du Gard, above all in the Rule, and in the commentaries — in the Gloss — that he made on it, Fr Libermann has spoken abundantly about community life and of the virtues proper to it, as indispensable for apostolic life. We have synthesized his thought around the following titles and texts.

*All Spiritans must live in community*

**“An important and fundamental rule in the Congregation is that all its members will live in community under a common rule and never work for any length of time separately and singly” (ND II 272).**

**“The missionary commits himself to the Congregation only on condition of having a community life. He does not make his commitment with a bishop but with the Congregation represented by the Superior General... and so the superior cannot give subjects to a bishop except on that condition, which is a real tacit contract (ND IX 99, 188).**

Libermann constantly feared that the work to be accomplished would take precedence over community life, and the latter would be sacrificed to the former:

**“They see souls to be saved, work to be done, and community life as a fetter to be shaken off. They have done with community life in order to give vent to their burning desires. Believing they are moved by zeal they give in to natural impetuosity. They console themselves for the loss of recollection and commu-**

nity life by the good that is being done to the souls they try to save, and they never think of the harm to themselves and others... If the Congregation was reduced to this by the imprudent zeal of its members, what use would it be?" (ND XIII 294).

In a letter to Fr Boulanger, he explains clearly that the apostolate really is our essential purpose but that attachment to the Congregation, *principle of our Community life*, is not a secondary matter. This letter was written in 1850, a date which underlines its importance, for that was the time he feared that the intense zeal of "his" bishops would cause damage to the spirit of the Congregation. It would be interesting to read Fr Boulanger's letter, but unfortunately it has disappeared. However, the reply indicates a whole diatribe of those times, which has been repeated throughout the history of the Spiritans.

"Missionaries should not be above all men of some country or other, but rather above all men of God and of the Church, then members of the Congregation to which they are attached with all the affection of their heart. In this Congregation then they are engaged in the salvation of souls in the country where they happen to be, as long as they are there by God's will. But there as elsewhere, they are members of the body to which they have been attached by God."

Each community, united to the Congregation, is much more effective in action, says F. Libermann in the Memorandum of 1840.

"Living in community, and being directed in all things by the same superior, would bring about incomparably greater good than if one acted in isolation. Undertakings are more extensive, there is a plan and a course followed and well made out; there is greater vigour in performance, more accord and union in action; everything is more regular and better conceived. The superior examines his undertaking with his council, he calculates the difficulties in advance, prepares the means needed to succeed and sorts out all the circumstances. He can undertake more things, because he has at hand more powerful means and he can avail of his subjects at will. Besides, since each one is employed in the occupation for which he has the greatest aptitude, things are carried out better; and, moreover, since each one has to deal with only that thing for which he has responsi-

bility, he will give himself to it entirely. There is a numberless mass of advantages in favour of community life". (ND II, 71).

*The Aim is Twofold: Apostolic Effectiveness and the Sanctification of the Members of the Congregation.*

**"To bring the apostolic life — for which Spiritan life is intended — to its perfection, to assure the continuance and the development of the works in which it engages and to foster the holiness of its members, the Congregation has adopted life in community as its founding principle. Its members shall all live in community at all times"** (Rule of 1849, quoted in the Rule of 1987).

(Cf. also the "Notice sur la Congrégation" of 1850, in which Fr. Libermann uses nearly the same words.)

**"All the members, by the fact of committing themselves to the Congregation, place in common the use of their intellectual, corporal, and moral faculties, to be employed for the glory of God and the salvation of souls, for one and the same end, which is the special end of the work, in the same spirit, which is the general spirit of the Society, and under the direction of the same rules, which are those adopted by it. Thus all the members of the Congregation form only one and the same body, thinking, feeling and acting in perfect unity for the glory of God and the salvation of souls"** (ND X 454-5).

This indicates a particular aspect of his thought: putting in common the corporal, intellectual and moral faculties of each one for the good of the perfect unity of all; in modern terms, it is material, intellectual and spiritual sharing of the goods of each for the common good.

*There will be a Family Spirit, that of Jesus and Mary*

**"They will relate to each other as children of one same family, that of Jesus and Mary. They will treat each other as brothers, animated by one same spirit, the Spirit of God, and one same feeling, that which pervaded the holy and immaculate heart of Mary. They will look upon as done to Jesus himself what they do to their brothers and they will behave in all things with them**



**as they would have behaved towards the divine Saviour and his holy Mother” (ND X 537).**

**“Community life is a gathering of souls and not only of bodies; it is a gathering of souls all tending to the same end. In a religious community, this end is supernatural, so community life should be a life quite supernatural with God as its origin and end” (Gloss 59).**

Libermann sees the heart of the community in the fruits of the Spirit lived by each one. **“When things are looked at in God’s light, agreement is easily reached” (ND X 85).**

*The Soul of Community is true, sincere Charity*

Libermann constantly brings back community to this essential reality.

**“We all have the same virtue of charity poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, and our Lord’s same command about charity: love one another as I have loved you. We have come together to live together and work in harmony; he wants us specially united among ourselves” (Gloss 124).**

**“The soul of all their conduct ought to be a true and sincere charity; they should put their confreres before everyone else, loving them as other selves with that genuine love of the holy heart of their Mother, in the overflowing fulness of God’s Spirit that filled it” (ND X 539).**

*Love for the Congregation will also be a Fruit of Charity*

**“Their charity will extend not only to their confreres individually, but they will have the greatest tenderness for the Congregation and attachment to it. In it they are united in a holy way by virtue of the divine Spirit and in the loving and holy heart of their good Mother. They will do all in their power to increase its spiritual advantages, to make it more apt for procuring God’s greater glory, and make it a faithful servant of their adorable Master, in the Church” (ND X 541).**

“Charity, charity above all. . .” was Libermann’s last message!

*The Union of the Members of the Community is a Union of Mind and Heart*

**"The union that should reign among us is to be a union of mind and heart. A union of mind: this contains three elements and, as it were, three degrees. Not to wish to subject others to our ideas, especially not to become annoyed when they do not think as we do; to have a certain disposition and facility for coming round to the opinion of others; to act as if one was of the other's opinion, when one foresees no problems from that. . . . A union of heart: this consists in the mutual and intimate affection we should have for one another. . . . What we do to our brothers we consider as done to our Lord" (Gloss 124-5).**

Libermann wrote to the Community of Gorée, threatened with disunity and at loggerheads with the Mother House:

**"The presence of the Spirit of God in your souls will show itself in your perfect, cordial and constant unity. Through this unity you will bring about wonders of grace in the lost souls confided to you, and in it you will find relief and consolation in the difficulties and hard work of your apostolate. Without unity, all the work confided to you will fall apart" (ND VII 151-152).**

*The Heart is the Catalyst of the Community*

**"This charity must be cordial. It is not enough to have it on the lips or even in actions, it must spring from a truly affectionate heart that struggles with fidelity and constancy against temptations that might arise against that virtue" (ND X 539-40).**

Affection is a word Libermann often uses when he speaks of the relationship between confreres of one and the same community. He expanded on it in the letter to the community of Dakar and Gabon:

**"Be full of affection, gentleness and openness with superiors in order to make their burden easier to carry. Live together in union and in the most perfect peace of charity. Support one another mutually, put up with your faults, ease the pain for one another, comfort your confreres, do not judge them, love them and be gentle towards them even when they happen to annoy you.**

**When you happen not to be of the same opinion as your confreres, lose your own judgement in the general opinion. Tenaciousness to one's own ideas is one of the greatest evils for people who ought to live together in the peace and charity of Jesus-Christ" (L.Sp. IV 458).**

In the same letter Fr Libermann elaborates on the qualities that should be those of Spiritan apostles, "community men and apostolic men" at the same time.

**"Learn to be true community men and genuinely apostolic men, learn the wisdom of God so that you may be able to contribute, each one according to his capacity, to bringing the great work God has confided to you to a happy conclusion".**

For more exact knowledge on his thinking about apostolic community, this lengthy letter must be consulted (ND IX 326).

*The Primary Obligation of a Community is the Spiritual Good of its Members.*

**"We should not love a confrere with a view to being loved, nor through taste and natural inclination, nor for the pleasure to be found in such an affection. Loving our confreres thus, in God and for God, we shall try to bring about God's rule in them. That is why the first duty charity imposed on each member of the Congregation is the wish for the sanctification of its members. They will often pray for that, they will give the good example, in order to be carried along to perfection" (ND X 540-1).**

Whence the need for tolerance, gentleness, mutual support and, on the other hand, the need to combat jealousy, touchiness and rigidity!

**"All right, what is the most powerful means I use for guiding people? It is to tolerate in each one the faults that I foresee I can do nothing about, sometimes putting up with the most unseemly manners and the most uncouth, above all leaving each one in his condition and trying to bring him to perfection in that condition. Be quite sure that nothing is ever accomplished in this line by force, contradiction or resistance, but also on the contrary that everything is accomplished and obtained by support, tolerance, gentleness and calm" (ND VIII 113).**



*True Charity is both Practical and Simple*

**"It will be practical. It is not enough to have it in the heart, it must be visible in the close contacts each one has with his confreres, the services rendered them on all occasions, the affability and goodwill with which they are done, the gentleness with which we treat others either in words or behaviour.**

**It will be simple. In words and behaviour all affected show of charity must be avoided, all subtle reflections that only amuse, flattering turns of phrase; above all there must never be words that give rise to vanity. We will speak and act with that sincere and simple affection of the children of God, artlessly, and not with the false charity of worldly people"** (ND X 540).

This down-to-earth and simple love! . . .

*Authority is in the Service of Community*

Libermann wrote to a superior:

**"Always remember that gentleness and conviction gain entry into souls, while firmness and rigidity only bring about external changes. So for the external ordering of the house let there be firmness (but gentle and kind), for the interior guidance of souls let there be gentleness and kindness. One must be pliable and flexible for leading souls, for following their different states, managing with them all the time, going along with all their ways and characteristics as they are natural to them, so as to bear them along — all the while encouraging them — according to their different states. This is what St Paul calls making oneself all things to all people"** (ND IV 295-6).

**"Remember what I told you: most souls are lost through discouragement. It is the universal evil, especially among good souls. Uphold and encourage them and you will find that our Lord will come to your help"** (ND IV 296).

As for the rest of the community, he asks not only for obedience in a fraternal spirit, but that as well they make the superior's task easy by their esteem, affection, and what we would call today co-responsibility.

*Exercise Community Discernment*

Libermann spoke of discernment without using the word. In it, the apostolic community with its superior finds its way of seeking in common the will of God.

**“When you have to undertake something important, weigh the matter before God together. Begin by discarding all prejudices, favourable or unfavourable. Do not give in to haste, rush nothing, weigh well in a spirit of faith what has to be done and reason out the matter. Put your trust in God in your undertakings, but be neither presumptuous nor misled. Your soul must be led in faith but your mind, thus strengthened, must reason out matters, act maturely and deliberately. Leave nothing to chance, foresee all possibilities; but, once you have taken measures, put your trust in God alone... always leave something to Providence” (ND VII 193).**

An article in the Provisional Rule even makes provision for the carrying out of discernment in the government of the Congregation.

**“In the examination of something it is hoped to undertake, they will proceed in the following manner. They will begin by recollecting themselves in the presence of our Lord. In this interior recollection and with the help of the divine Spirit, they will contemplate the question as a whole and in all its details, as regards the persons and the things connected with it, and as regards all the circumstances with which it is surrounded. When the question itself has thus been deepened and a more exact idea of it acquired, they will consider it in relation to the Congregation, its rules and its spirit, and also in relation to the consequences that could result for the same Congregation, for its rules and for its spirit. When these considerations have been concluded and it is seen that the thing can be done and ought to work for the great glory of God and for the good of souls, they will consider the means of carrying it out, both in themselves and in their relations with the end it is hoped to achieve, with the persons concerned and the circumstances, and above all with regard to their conformity to the spirit of our rules. Then they will try to foresee the difficulties and the obstacles that could occur, either because of the nature of the objective, or because of the means that have to be used, or**

because of the circumstances in which they find themselves, or because of the people involved. They will see to the means of overcoming these obstacles and difficulties; all of this always in the spirit and under the influence of our adorable Master, without contention and without natural activity, without vanity and without any seeking after self-love. This procedure should be followed more or less according to the importance of the matter under consideration and according to the circumstances” (ND II 314-315).

*Together the Community undertakes an Apostolic Project*

Fr Libermann often commented on the principles of common action that his first missionaries should follow:

- openness to the world and respect for freedom of conscience;
- an introduction to the local languages and customs;
- the creation of Christian communities;
- a directing of all energy towards the setting up of a local Church;
- the promotion of an indigenous clergy;
- the training of lay leaders, catechists, and Christian teachers;
- the highlighting of technical and agricultural schools, having in mind the “natural well being” they can provide;
- adaptation to the people and to their customs, “to the character of the people”;
- taking care to be all things to all people, “like servants to their masters”;
- respect for civil authority, but without compromise or cowardice;
- a constant ambition to extend the borders of the Church...

A programme remarkably in advance of its time!

### III - IN THE TEXTS OF THE RECENT GENERAL CHAPTERS AND OF OUR NEW “SPIRITAN RULE OF LIFE”

Through the texts of the General Chapters and in all the successive editions of our Rules and Constitutions from 1734 to our own days, the Congregation has given a prominent place to community life,



as one of the fundamental elements in our Spiritan tradition. At certain periods, the insistence has been more on legalistic criteria, at others on criteria regarding apostolic activity, and more recently on the profound unity of the community, equally concerned about its own internal life and about its apostolic fruitfulness — two distinct and complementary aspects of the same reality! It can be said that, since the chapter of 1968, under the impulse of the human sciences, of Vatican II and of spiritual renewal that is now becoming clear, a great step forward has been taken towards a more enlightened notion of the Spiritan “community project” and towards a more complete realization of it.

### 1) THE RECENT GENERAL CHAPTERS

The Chapter of 1968, close on the heels of “*Ad Gentes*” and “*Perfectae Caritatis*”, stressed the twofold aspect of “*community at the service of the missionary apostolate*” and “*community of fraternal life*”. Concerning the first, special consideration was given to solidarity with the “peoples and groups” among whom we live, to their cultural and religious values, to the economic and social realities of their lives, and to their aspirations (CDD 40). The second underlined a common sharing of joys and sorrows in genuine charity and the importance of both private and community prayer.

The Chapter of 1974, in alluding to the missionary openness of Spiritan communities, insisted on the witness we ought to give to the people around us, on our hospitality, our welcome, and our participation in the life of the city or country. It invited us to learn to analyse dispassionately the tension and conflict that arise from the profound changes of our times and from a certain consequent insecurity, so that, in community dialogue, a satisfactory solution may be reached. Other preoccupations of the time were: the readaptation of returned missionaries; helping confreres who have had to give up their previous work to find suitable new ministry, to be assured of a sabbatical period of renewal, and to be integrated into a new Spiritan community (GA 92).

The Chapter of 1980 first recognized various types of community: classical, regional, “new-style” communities, and the evidence that there exist in the Congregation different ways of looking at and living community life. It pleaded for a spiritual renewal of Spiritan community, in keeping with that going on in the life of the Church, for a special commitment to Justice and Peace, and it urged the Generalate

Team to “promote research on community life in the Congregation and on its development in the Church and in the world” (SL 96).

“Representing all our confreres, we affirm that community renewal is a priority for the Congregation during the next six years” (SL 95).

## 2) THE NEW SPIRITAN RULE OF LIFE

The spirit of our spiritan tradition is given an excellent restating in the modern context of our apostolic life by the new Rule of Life. It is this we want to highlight, within the limits of this research, having recourse as far as possible to the text itself, often particularly eloquent.

And, first, the great diversity in the concrete living out of community life, but also the strict demands it makes on us. All the confreres are members of a local community or a regional community (N. 32, 32.1, 32.2).

The apostolic life of a community is characterized by its zeal. It is the Spirit who “shapes our personal and community life”.

11. **We are participating within the Church in the mission of Christ, in communion with him and all people, proclaiming a salvation that is a gift from God, liberation from all that oppresses people, joy in knowing the Lord and being known by him (cf. E.N. 9).**

The community seeks God’s will for it and sets up a *community project*.

44. **We meet regularly as a community:**
  - to discern what God’s will for us is;
  - to organise our fraternal life together;
  - to plan and evaluate our activities;
  - to present suggestions and express opinions to help clarify the consequent decision to be made by those in charge.
- 44.3 **Each community plans what it wants to achieve and how it lives within the framework that the Rule provides. This planning sets down what community life asks of the members, in terms of time and occasions of prayer in common, of deeper sharing of our lives and of periodic evaluation of the community’s life and of our apostolic work.**

- 39.2 **A community's life passes through moments of sorrow and moments of joy. Time is needed for growing to take place. Community living makes unremitting demands upon each member to be converted — even to “die and rise again”.**

It is advisable “*to listen to what the Spirit is saying to the Churches*” to-day. (Revelation, II, 29).

- 44.1 **To ensure that our discernment is in conformity with the Spiritan calling, we endeavour to be receptive to the Holy Spirit as he speaks to us through the local Church, the universal Church, our human environment and through the world we are living in.**
- 44.2 **This discernment process always takes place in an atmosphere of dialogue and prayer, and in the light of God's word.**

This project includes also a particular period of *community prayer*. The Spirit of God has inspired us to insert in the New Rule of life a special chapter on prayer to highlight better an essential part of our Spiritan life.

- 98.1 **Our living in community demands that every individual take part in the prayer that is offered in common. Each individual has a right to expect from the community the fraternal support of its prayer.**
99. **Among its expressed objectives each community decides the times and the forms of its daily prayer in common and of the Eucharist, allowing as far as is possible for the participation of the local Christian community. The community also fixes its calendar of retreats and times of more intense recollection.**

For we are all as a community responsible for our life and our apostolate — “responsible and co-responsible” at the same time.

- 43.1 **What is given to each one to do is important not only for his own fulfilment, but also for the wellbeing of the community and the spread of the gospel.**
- 43.2 **The superior sees to it that each one does in fact do what has been assigned to him. This responsibility confided to each one is to receive recognition and to be respected by the other members of the community.**

It is to be expected that conflicts and tensions may arise. They should be welcomed in faith and their resolution encouraged in a fra-



ternal spirit. The communal celebration of the sacrament of reconciliation can contribute greatly to this.

- 95.1 **On an occasion when Spiritans meet among themselves, it is opportune to hold a common celebration of Reconciliation. Such a celebration can help us to discover and to recognise together the faults and sinfulness for which we are collectively responsible.**

*Community discernment*, “in dialogue with our superiors and our brother Spiritans”, will enable us to carry out the common project. In fact, being at the service of one another implies:

- 29.1 **sharing our possessions and our talents, mutual support and affection, and discerning in common God’s will for the community and for its mission.**
25. **Attentive to the signs of the times, we reexamine periodically the reasons that underlie our present commitment and our present apostolate.**
- 25.1 **This review is done through a dialogue with the local Church in a shared exercise of discernment. It takes the individuals who are concerned into account and also the demands of the Spiritan calling and the facts of the case.**

*We build up Christian communities* and promote their growth (Nos. 15, 1; 15, 2; 15, 3).

But we carry out this task in genuine openness to an *encounter between cultures and the Gospel*.

- 16.1 **We strive in every way we can for a fruitful coming together of local cultural and religious traditions with the gospel of Christ.**

The community is particularly attentive to the human milieu which shapes it and to the socio-economic climate in which it lives. *Internationality* promotes this sensitivity.

37. **We who come from different cultures, continents and nations, and who have different outlooks, are brought together by the Spirit of Pentecost into one larger community, the Congregation. Cultural diversity is welcomed as a positive factor. Our unity bears witness to reconciliation in Christ.**

Finally, a word, in this eclectic selection, about *ongoing formation*, which enables us to adapt better to the signs of the times.

- 142.1 **Ongoing formation involves all aspects of our calling — human, spiritual, theological, professional and pastoral.**
- 142.2 **It should help our thinking on our apostolic activities, our discernment of the signs of the times, and the changes of attitudes and of outlook that are imperative.**

Our Constitutions have thus painted a portrait of the Spiritan community, which it is now up to us to welcome, to reflect on, to pray about and to put into practice as a gift of God for our times.

*(A more fully worked out commentary on the chapter "Our Community life" is to be found in the General Council's Handbook to the Rule of Life).*





# COMMUNITY IN THE HUMAN SCIENCES AND IN THE THEOLOGY OF VATICAN II

## INTRODUCTION

In recent times there have been great changes in our thinking about the person, his development, his rights in society and with regard to authority. It is expected that a person will be able to develop his talents and participate in decisions that affect his life, and that the basic equality of all human beings will be respected. Human solidarity is greatly valued, and the structures of society at all levels are expected to be such that they do not stifle a true community of free persons but rather encourage it. These developments are due in no small part to the greater availability of education to all, to the advances in science and technology (especially in the human sciences and in their application to human problems) and to new theological insights, as expressed especially in Vatican 2.

These changes in outlook have of course affected religious life, as well as attitudes and expectations with regard to community living. As in so many things these days we are caught between two stools: the old way of acting, whose frame-work has been largely shattered, and the new way following on Vatican 2, which has not yet become clearly and solidly established. Here we turn to the human sciences (anthropology, psychology and sociology) as well as to the theology of Vatican 2, to help us to understand better the needs of religious community today and how best they might be met. To achieve this we take certain key words, now in vogue (such as, *animation, structures, participation, communion, unity in diversity*), and having considered briefly what anthropology, psychology, sociology, or Vatican 2 theology can tell us about them and about community living, we point to certain possible applications of our discoveries to the building up of community.

### “ANIMATION”

The use of “animation” with regard to a community indicates that the community is not regarded as a number of objects to be manipulated, or as a simple reservoir of energy to be used, but as a group of *persons*. The community as a whole is not a machine to be operated from outside or from above. Rather is it like a person; it is conscious of itself; it makes choices, decides on options; feels its weaknesses and deficiencies; experiences failure; wants to protect its freedom. It is normally a WE.

To *animate*, then, is to give soul, life to a community, to help it to grow, wake up, and activate the energies and potentialities it possesses.

The *animator* is within the community. A living being has within itself its own principle of life. There is no question then of placing the animator on one side and the community on the other. It is the community which animates itself, with an “animator”, who is also the “superior”. The animator is he who in the community helps the members to encounter each other, to consider the real problems, to express themselves freely, and together discover God’s will for them. His first priority is persons rather than material or technical concerns.

The *purpose* of animation is to bring about and harmonize a double growth:

- the human, spiritual, and apostolic growth of each one;
- the growth of the community as such in cohesion, vitality and apostolic effectiveness.

The *spirit* which sustains this process arises from a conviction that the community is a group of persons who have need of each other in order that each as an individual, and all together as a group, may fulfil their vocation and mission.

## COMMUNITY IN THE HUMAN SCIENCES

### I – COMMUNITY AND ANTHROPOLOGY: STRUCTURES

*Structures*, in the sense we are using the word, derive from the consciousness of a value which is to be incarnated in our world, and

which consequently requires concrete means of expression and maintenance. When a structure is given a juridical character it becomes an *institution*.

Structures are made for man; they are for the group what habits are for the person, with analogous advantages and risks. They represent at the same time a limit (a time-table obliges me to have lunch at a certain hour) and a richness (the time-table enables me to eat better, at less cost, in company, etc.).

Structures give the impression of permanence; often we find them in existence already at our birth or at the time we join the group; their evolution is generally slow and they have a tendency to persist.

Structures should have the following characteristics:

- *authenticity*: the genuine expression of a content;
- *functionality*: making it easier to live out a value;
- *flexibility*: capacity to adapt to the present situation of the group and of its mission.

### *Some Applications to Spiritan Community*

- 1) The community gives itself the structures that its life and mission require.
- 2) The community gives preference to the life and promptings of the Spirit over mere laws, structures, regulations and traditions.
- 3) The community periodically undertakes revision of its structures.
- 4) The community develops in tandem awareness of values and elaboration of structures.

## II – COMMUNITY AND PSYCHOLOGY

If a community is to be authentic it must overcome certain obstacles of a psychological kind and meet certain basic requirements of the same order.



### A. *Obstacles to be overcome*

Among possible obstacles to true community are the following:

- 1) settling into a passive and secure way of life:
  - through fear of the responsible use of personal freedom;
  - through an excessive desire for security;
  - through abandoning the exercise of one's own freedom into the hands of authority (a consequence of the first two attitudes);
  - through a notion of obedience which leaves all initiative to superiors.
- 2) forgetfulness of certain specifically human values, such as:
  - friendship;
  - respect and politeness;
  - the need for relaxation;
  - the need for the normal expression of feelings; etc.
- 3) not adverting to certain realities which mark the times we live in, such as:
  - new conditions of life;
  - the advent of a new type of man
 who, having a deep sense of personal freedom and responsibility, expects to be informed and consulted before assuming responsibilities, yet is open to co-operation and participation.

### B. *Requirements to be met*

The community is, above all, a group of persons who, here and now, choose to stay united to fulfil together the same mission, to strive together towards the same end. Therefore, the community in mind here is not only, nor even primarily, a *community of life* (with no mission outside of itself), nor is it only a *work team or community* (with no common life), but it is an apostolic community, that is, a community at the same time of life and of work.

It is vital then that there be:

- genuinely friendly and fraternal interpersonal relations;
- a dynamic convergence of everyone's efforts and a determining of functions and roles;
- a common objective, which everyone understands and wants to attain, even at the cost of renunciation and sacrifice, and which will channel the energies of all, while arousing enthusiasm and creativity.

### C. *Some Applications to Spiritan Community*

1. The Community regards friendly interpersonal relations as of the greatest importance and makes use of every occasion to multiply and deepen them (e.g., feastdays and birthdays; welcome to new and returned members, and to families and friends of confreres; outings and relaxation together; informal meetings, etc.).

2. The Community gives preference to personal contact over collective contact.

3. The Community finds psychologically suitable times for meetings and dialogue.

It is desirable that the superior in particular should know a little about the different types of character and the reactions which mark them:

- the shy person tending to turn in on himself,
- the aggressive tending to revolt,
- the passive tending to be interiorly blocked and silent.

4. The Community allows time for growth in sensitivity, that is, awareness of and response to certain situations and appeals are prepared and allowed to mature. Imposition, forcing or rushing would run the risk of creating blocks.

5. The Community ensures that each of its members has the minimum of autonomy, of “distance”, necessary for him to be himself.

6. The Community decides on a common objective which, within the framework of the Rule of life, concretizes its vocation and mission, and situates it within the wider objective of the Province or District.

7. The Community is united in striving to attain this objective and, to this end, it divides out the functions according to the gifts and abilities of its members.

8. The Community ensures reasonable living conditions for all its members, particularly in the economic sphere, on the basis of equality and taking into account the requirements of the common good.

If this is not observed, the community will come up against blocks or disinterest in certain of its members.

## III – COMMUNITY AND SOCIOLOGY

A. *Participation and Co-responsibility*

In a static society, the stability and permanence of the community depends above all on the implementation of the value “tradition”. In a dynamic society like ours, subject to more and more profound changes, the permanence and effectiveness of a community depends on the implementation of the values “adaptation” and “creation”.

To that might be added the fact that the Congregation, in common with many other institutions, has been decentralized.

*Change and de-centralization* multiply the decisions; many of them important, that have to be taken at all levels. And this is happening at a time when this new type of man, who expects to be informed and to participate, is coming to the fore.

1. *To participate* means to be and to feel a party to the life of the community and to contribute actively to the carrying out of its mission.

2. Participation is given room to operate in the three following ways:

– *Those in charge look for participation.*

They welcome whatever is worked out at the grass roots, and eventually ratify it and make it the object of a decision for the good of all.

This they do *with sympathy* and *with discernment* as well, for they remain the guardians of the community project and make sure that the proposed initiatives are in harmony with the common good.

Thus the most general orientations are rooted in the experience and the research of everyone.

– *The members of the community accept this offer of participation.*

They accept their part in the responsibility that falls on the entire community, on the entire Province or District, or on the Congregation as a whole, particularly with regard to plans for the future.

This means that the cooperation of members, who do not hold official authority, is not reduced to consultation or intelligent carrying out of decisions, but involves the possibility and the duty (coextensive with obedience) of planning, making suggestions, taking part in the decision, of innovating and being creative.

– *At the same level, participation is opposed*

– to all compartmentalization or parallelism,



ers,

- to all encroachment upon the area of responsibility of others,

- to all disinterest in the work of others;

*consists in*

- a pooling of all gifts and charisms,
- mutual aid and cooperation,
- possible temporary replacement.

### 3. *The moments of participation occur:*

- at the elaboration of the decisions,
- at the taking of the decisions,
- at their carrying out or realization.

a) For the *elaboration of decisions*, participation requires:

- that useful information be distributed and that there exist, to this end, adequate structures of information and communication.

- that the reflection and discernment be the work of everyone, and that structures to make this collaboration concretely possible be set up.

- that the members of the community be encouraged to put forward initiatives.

b) In the *taking of decisions*, participation requires:

- that the members of the community be able to see themselves as authors of the decisions either *directly*, or *indirectly*, through a fair representation of everyone, and that, to this end, the required structures be set up.

c) In the *carrying out of decisions*, participation requires:

- planning which, after the objectives have been set, determines the stages; specifies tasks, roles or functions; clearly assigns responsibilities and lines of authority.

- a programme which marks out the activities by which, little by little, the stages will be put into effect.

- a periodical revision or evaluation.

- the creation and use of the instruments necessary to carry out these activities.

## B. *The Sociological Nature of Apostolic Religious Community*

Sociology usually recognizes three types of "primary groups" (within which relations are "face to face"):

– the *group of origin*, united through blood relationship or neighbourhood community. The type here is the family, whose characteristics, at this level, can be summarized thus:

– no choice in belonging;

– fairly traditional and authoritarian structures linking father-mother-children;

– perspectives towards the future are respectful towards traditions and identities which are in no way subject to individual choices.

– the *personal group*, constituted by individuals who are linked to one another because they like to be together. The type here is the group of friends.

– the *ideological or “prophetic” group*, whose characteristics are:

– a common cause, which attracts members to its service;

– “revolutionary” perspectives: society ought to be changed;

– “eschatological” perspectives: society ought to be changed in the name of a definitive vision of things and of history;

– a mysticism which controls the values to be promoted.

Quite obviously, and in spite of what might have been said in the past, apostolic religious community does not belong to the “family” type of community, even if it should reproduce some of its traits. It belongs to the ideological or “prophetic” group.

It is worth noting, however, that apostolic religious community can easily shift towards the “family” type of community with:

– submission to tradition,

– making the relationship superior-subject analogous to the relationship parent-child,

– giving priority to its own protection and survival.

Such a “*prophetic*”, apostolic Community cannot but be open:

– it does not isolate itself, cut itself off;

– it is welcoming;

– it is fully integrated in society and in particular with those whom it is intended to serve.

### *C. Some Applications to Spiritan Community*

1. The Congregation, at all levels, applies itself to promoting participation and co-responsibility.

2. The Community sets up and makes use of the required structures of information and participation.

3. The Community is open to its human milieu and shows solidarity with it.

4. The Community is sensitive to the changes taking place in our times and evangelizes them through its apostolic activity.

## COMMUNITY IN THE THEOLOGY OF VATICAN II

### I - CHURCH - COMMUNION

In the *Constitution on the Church* of Vatican II, the Church is described as "the universal sacrament of salvation" (LG 48) and as the sacrament of "union with God and of the unity of all mankind" (LG 1). The vision of salvation that inspired the ecclesiology of Vatican II is that of a *communion* of human beings among themselves and with God, in the risen Christ, through the working of his Spirit. Of this communion the Church is the sacrament, that is, the *sign* and *instrument*. For, "God has gathered together as one all those who look upon Jesus as the author of salvation and the source of unity and peace, and has established them as the Church, that for each and all she may be the visible sacrament of this saving unity" (LG 9).

So, "it has not pleased God to call men to share his life merely as individuals without any mutual bonds. Rather, he wills to mould them into a people in which his sons, once scattered abroad, can be gathered together (cf. Jn. 11, 52)" (AG 2). The aim of God's universal plan is "to establish peace or communion between sinful human beings and himself, as well as to fashion them into a fraternal community" (AG 3).

*The model and source of this communion is the very life of the Blessed Trinity* itself. In his priestly prayer at the Last Supper Jesus begs the Father:

"That they all may be one, as thou, Father, in me, and I in thee;  
that they also may be one in us:  
that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.

And the glory which thou hast given to me,  
 I have given to them:  
 that they may be one, as we also are one.  
 I in them, and thou in me:  
 that they may be made perfect in one:  
 and the world may know thou hast sent me and hast loved  
 them,  
 as thou hast also loved me" (Jn. 17, 21-23).

One could say, paraphrasing Genesis, that God-Community builds up his People as community in his own image and likeness, not only because he lets them participate in his own life, but also because this participation is radically communitarian, a participation by the whole People as such.

In fact, *all the sacraments have a communitarian dimension*; the functions they confer exist in view of the holiness and unity of the whole Body (LG 11).

The Church is, at the same time,

*one* People of God and an immense *multitude* of citizens,  
*one* Body of Christ and a *variety* of members  
*one* Temple of the Spirit made of *innumerable* living stones.

*The Holy Spirit distributes different special graces* and different gifts (charisms) among the faithful, all for the building up of the Church, "for the sake of the common good" (I Cor. 12, 7) (LG 12).

This entails:

- The radically equal dignity of all Christians, all enriched by the same God (cf. LG 32);
- The sincere recognition of the gifts of each one, given for the common good (LG 32);
- The solidarity and complementarity that should mark the relations between all the members.

The unity in Christ to be found in the Church is for all mankind and is therefore *catholic*, that is, by its very nature it is meant, in accordance with the salvific will of God, to embrace all people. And so the Church "seeks for the return of all humanity and all its goods under Christ the Head in the unity of the Spirit" (LG 13).

Catholicity and unity are correlative, then. For, "in virtue of this catholicity each part contributes its own gifts to the other parts and to the whole Church, so that the whole and each of the parts are strength-



ened by the common sharing of all things and by the common effort to attain to fullness in unity" (LG 13).

It is clear, then, that this *catholic unity* of the Church impels her to *missionary activity*, while missionary activity, in its turn, expresses and perfects her catholic unity (cf. AG 6).

The Church, therefore, has the duty to evangelize (cf. LG 17), that is, "to carry forth the good news to every sector of the human race so that by its inherent strength it may enter into the hearts of men and renew the human race" (EN 18, cf. 14-15). All this requires that the Church and each of its members:

- do not live for themselves but for mission (cf. EN 8 and 14);
- recognize with humility and joy the elements of salvation that God has placed in all people and in all human groups (cf. LG 8, AG 11, and EN 53: "innumerable seeds of the Word");
- allow themselves to be enriched by them (in the attitude of a disciple before God, present well beyond the frontiers of the Church as institution) (cf. GS 44);
- make their own fullness, always "partial", subject to the purification and to the full realization of Gospel values (cf. GS 38);
- accept the challenge of unity in diversity that all that implies;
- thus serve the common holiness of all humanity and of all created reality: reconciling everyone and everything in Christ, the Head of all creation (cf. LG 48; Rom. 8, Eph. 1, Col. 1).

Finally, it is worthy of note that the *extraordinary Synod of Bishops* that met in Rome towards the end of 1985 to assess the implementation of Vatican II, considered that:

**"The ecclesiology of communion is the central and fundamental idea of the Council's documents. Koinonia/communion, founded on the Sacred Scripture, has been held in great honour in the early Church and in the Oriental Churches to this day. Thus, much was done by the Second Vatican Council so that the Church as communion might be more clearly understood and concretely incorporated into life" (Relatio Finalis II C 1)**

The Final Report then goes on to remark that:

**"Because the Church is communion, there must be participation and co-responsibility at all her levels" (II C 6).**

And it also notes that:

**“The Church as communion is a sacrament for the salvation of the world” (II D 1).**

## II – RELIGIOUS LIFE

Religious life is, by a new and special title, consecration to God and dedication to the good of the whole Church (LG 44-45 and PC 5-6).

Consequently, religious life is not only total consecration to God in and for the Church; by its nature it is meant to “signify”, visibly and in an efficacious and challenging way, not only for the faithful but for all men, the essential and fundamental characteristics of the Church:

- its dimension of *mystery*, of human reality transformed and unified by the life-giving presence of God;
- its dimension of fraternal *communion* of life, of charity, and of truth in the Father, the Son and the Spirit;
- its dimension of *sacrament*, that is, universal sign and instrument of salvific unity, for human kind and for the whole world.

Now, religious life cannot be the “sign” of the Church unless it makes abundantly evident the unity and communion, which constitute the inner core of the Church’s very nature. When it comes to speak of *common life*, the Council can find no better way to describe it than by applying to religious life all the most beautiful characteristics of the primitive Church gathered together in a common holiness. The religious community is “of one heart and soul”, “in the communion of one and the same Spirit”, where religious “should live together as brothers and should give pride of place to one another in esteem (cf. Rom. 12, 10), carrying one another’s burdens (cf. Gal. 6, 12)”; the community is “gathered together as a true family in the Lord’s name” and “enjoys his presence”; it is enlivened by that love which “sums up the law (cf. Rom. 13, 10) and is the bond which makes us perfect (cf. Col. 3, 14)”; and this “unity of the brethren” is “a symbol of the coming of Christ (cf. Jn. 13, 35; 17, 21) and is a source of great apostolic power” (PC 15).

## RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY

In the religious community as in the other communities of the Church, the Spirit is the principle of unity, diversity, and complementarity.

1. *Principle of unity*, he gathers the faithful together in the Church, in the teaching of the apostles and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and prayer (LG 13).

2. *Principle of diversity*, "allotting his gifts according as he wills (I Cor. 12, 11), he also distributes special graces among the faithful of every rank.

By these gifts he makes them fit and ready to undertake various tasks and offices for the renewal and building up of the Church... (LG 12).

3. *Principle of complementarity*, he makes us realize that we are members one of another (Rom. 12, 5). Each of us has need of the others, for

– the gifts of each being only partial, it is only in being gathered into a harmonious whole that we can incarnate and manifest the many-sided greatness of God's saving love;

– and the identity and the originality proper to each can be developed only in being put at the service of the development of the others and of the whole. I can be myself only in helping others to be themselves.

There is a special *presence of Christ* among those who live in communion. "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Mt. 18, 20). Christ gives the Community a sacramental value: he links his mysterious, but very real presence to it.

The fruits of this special presence of Christ are:

– the understanding of the Scriptures, the rediscovery of joy, the overcoming of fears, the growth of courage (the story of the disciples on the road to Emmaus is a good example of the fruits of the presence of Jesus: Lk. 24, 13 ff.); love, cheerfulness and peace (cf. Gal. 5, 22 ff).

– the ability to attract new members to the community, since it arouses “sympathy” all around it (cf. Acts 2, 4 and 4, 33). Instead of disguising it, the community unveils the attractiveness of Christ.

“That the world may believe that you have sent me” (Jn. 17, 21-239). To our unity in Christ is linked the greatest fruit of all: the faith and salvation of the world. “It is clear that the success of evangelization is undoubtedly dependent on the witness of unity given by the Church. This imposes on us a heavy responsibility but it is also a source of consolation” (EN 77).

### III – COMMUNITY AND MISSION

#### 1. *The Human Community*

According to the Declaration on non-Christian Religions of Vatican II,

**“all peoples comprise a single community, and have a single origin, since God made the whole race of men dwell over the entire face of the earth (cf. Acts 17 : 26). One also is their final goal: God”.**

Therefore, the human race is one in creation, one in vocation and destiny, and this human unity is rooted in the unicity of God.

Human unity, however, is not merely given; it is also a task to be achieved. For, sin introduces division and so opposes God’s plan for the unity of the human race. As Origen puts it, “where there is sin there is multiplicity”. Sin has the double effect of separating people from God and from one another. Redemption consist in restoring both unions. The double communion of human beings with God and with each other is the positive aspect of salvation. In this does the Kingdom of God consist.

#### 2. *The Kingdom Community*

In Chapter 21 of the Apocalypse, heaven is described as a city. Nowadays theology is abandoning an overly individualistic eschatology, with its insistence on the particular judgment and the beatific vision as a purely personal experience, the resurrection of the body being treated as a kind of appendix. The general resurrection is once again



given the central position that it holds in the New Testament, so that the community aspect of final Salvation in the city of God has been restored to theology.

### 3. *The Sacramental Community of the Church*

Of this Salvation, consisting in the communion of human beings with God and with one another in God's Kingdom, the Church is the sacrament; that is, its sign and the instrument for bringing it about. The present Church is not to be identified with the Kingdom of God in its fullness, but is rather "the Kingdom of Christ now present in mystery" (Lumen Gentium, 3), the Kingdom of God in its state of becoming, in its earthly state of growth.

### 4. *Mission as Building Community*

The Latin American bishops, meeting at Puebla in 1979, described the nature of liberation in Christ as follows:

**"There are two complementary and inseparable elements. The first is liberation from all forms of bondage, from personal and social sin, and from everything that tears apart the human individual and society: all this finds its source in egotism, in the mystery of iniquity. The second element is liberation for progressive growth in being through communion with God and with other human beings; this reaches its culmination in the perfect communion of heaven, where God is all in all and weeping forever ceases" (Puebla: Final Document, 432).**

The bishops drew the following conclusions for the Church in Latin America:

**"We Christians, in our role as People of God, are sent to be a truly reliable seed of unity, hope and salvation (LG 9). So today and tomorrow in Latin America we must be a community that lives its communion with the Blessed Trinity; that is the sign and presence of the crucified and risen Christ, who reconciles human beings with the Father in the Spirit, human beings with one another, and the world with its creator. . . We opt for a Church that is a sacrament of communion (LG 1), a Church that, in a history marked by conflicts, contributes irreplaceable**

**energies to promote the reconciliation and solidary unity of our peoples. . .” (Puebla, 1301-1302).**

### *5. Spiritan Community and Mission*

We could, with justice, apply what the Latin American bishops say about their Church to ourselves and to our communities, substituting “Spiritan” for “Christian” and “community” for “Church”. Like the universal Church and all local Churches, the Spiritan community is called to be sacramental and missionary in its way of life. It is called to be the sign of that salvation which consists in communion with God and between human beings; to be a sign of that reconciliation that overcomes the divisions that spring from human sinfulness. Spiritan community is meant to show the world what genuine community in Christ is really like, bearing witness to the risen Christ dwelling in its midst through his Spirit. This is an integral part of our ecclesial and missionary vocation.

Furthermore, it is in building up genuine human community in its milieu that the Spiritan community will fulfill its missionary mandate. For, where community is being created, the Spirit of Christ is at work, the reign of God is being established, salvation is being experienced and the Church of Christ is coming to be.

It is clear, of course, that genuine community can be formed only by dialogue inspired by love. That love will accept the other as other and respect his freedom, so that the kind of community being formed will not hinder personal development but greatly enhance it.

Too often person has been defined in an individual, even isolationist, sense. The mystery of the Trinity bears the strongest witness possible to the communitarian aspect of person. There, while each divine person remains completely distinct, he exists only in relation to other persons in a communion of self-giving love. It is in a similar community that the human person will grow and develop through knowing and loving other persons, and so find that fulfillment which is human salvation. And the Holy Spirit is always the link of loving communion, both within the Blessed Trinity and among human beings.

### *6. Fulfilling Human Aspirations for Unity, Justice and Peace*

All people of good will wish to overcome the divisions of mankind, manifested in war, the arms race, the gap between rich and poor

nations. God's plan is for "the whole human race to form one people of God, coalesce into the one body of Christ, and be built up into one temple of the Holy Spirit. Since it concerns brotherly concord, this design surely corresponds with the inmost wishes of all men" (Ad Gentes, 7). In fact, "the gospel has truly been a leaven of liberty and progress in human history, even in its temporal sphere, and always proves itself a leaven of brotherhood, of unity, and of peace. Therefore, not without cause is Christ hailed by the faithful as 'the expected of the nations, and their saviour'" (AG 8). Hence it is that one of the strongest motivations for mission, especially today, is that it helps to fulfill human aspirations by working for the peace and unity of mankind.

Modern man has a problem of communication. Only in Christ is full human communion possible, for all deep human communication is communication in the sacred. If we exclude that, only superficiality is left. Only in God will human beings discover their fundamental brotherhood. The discovery of the full depths of human brotherhood is made in the Church of Christ, for it is around the Eucharist, which is the source and end of the apostolate, that fraternal love is fully understood, and that the power is given to practise it.

To love one's own family, nation, tribe, social or cultural group is natural and easy — "even the pagans do as much" (cf. Mt. 5, 46-58). But to love those outside one's cultural frontiers, to love all men without exception, to create genuine communion with them, is possible only by the grace of God in Christ, the second Adam and head of our human race, who is effectively present in our world through the community of the Church, his sacrament.

And so the missionary is led by the Spirit of Christ to create genuine community where he can, through sincere dialogue with and service to his fellow men and women. He knows that in such community Christ is present, if only in a hidden way, when circumstances preclude explicit Christian faith. He is inspired by the purpose Christ, the Good Shepherd, set before himself when he exclaimed:

**"And there are other sheep I have that are not of this fold, and these I have to lead as well. They too will listen to my voice, and there will be only one flock, and one shepherd" (Jn. 10, 16).**

### *7. Some Applications to Spiritan Community*

1. The Congregation gives priority to the renewal of Spiritan community life, so that it corresponds to the expectations of our times and to the ecclesiology of Vatican II.

2. Both in its life and in its missionary activity, the Community tries to ensure the exercise of the charisms and gifts of each member according to their diversity and complementarity.

3. The Community gives priority to the creation and guidance of Christian communities, which give witness in their surroundings to Kingdom values: love, unity, justice and peace.

4. The Community shares the destiny of those to whom it is sent and among whom it lives.

5. The Community tries to become a place of encounter between cultures and of communion between Churches.

6. The Community welcomes the members given to it through events and circumstances as well as through the decisions of superiors, and considers itself enriched by them.



# GUIDELINES FOR COMMUNITY RENEWAL

## INTRODUCTION

The contributions of the human sciences and of theology, joined to an understanding of the Spiritan tradition and to the results of the recent survey made throughout the Congregation, enable us now to end up with a certain number of maxims which specify Spiritan community today in its many different forms. These, in their turn, are going to challenge us to examine our own community, to see what kind it is.

Here they are . . .

**THE COMMUNITY IS SPECIALLY AND DELIBERATELY COMMITTED TO THE SERVICE OF THE POOREST AND THE MOST NEGLECTED, WORKING FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE.**

*Questions:* Does our community present an image of commitment to the poor and for the poor in our way of life, in our activity on behalf of Justice and Peace, and in our service of the needy?

*(Concerning our commitment to the poor, see the Handbook to the Spiritan Rule of Life, chapters I and II).*

**THE COMMUNITY IS OPEN TO THE SOCIAL MILIEU IN WHICH IT IS PLACED AND TAKES ACCOUNT OF ITS ENVIRONMENT.**

*Questions:* Is our community aware of the social realities (in their cultural, political, economic and religious dimensions) of the districts, villages, families and milieu in which it lives? What kind of influence does it exercise or undergo? How deep are its relations with its environment? Is this the pre-occupation of one or two members of the community, or of the community as such?

**THE COMMUNITY IS INSERTED INTO THE LOCAL CHURCH, IN WHOSE LIFE IT IS PRESENT AND ACTIVE.**

*Questions:* Does our community lend its support to the local Church through prayer, reflection and action? And to the other religious communities which are part of it? From what point of view?

**THE COMMUNITY ENCOURAGES THE BIRTH AND GROWTH OF NEW CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES.**

*Questions:* Has our community made this apostolic priority its own? Is it a help and an example to the communities it animates?

**THE COMMUNITY MAINTAINS LINKS OF KNOWLEDGE, RESPECT, ESTEEM, AND COLLABORATION WITH OTHER CHURCHES, OR WITH THE GREAT RELIGIONS IN ITS AREA, WITNESSING TO JESUS CHRIST THROUGH OCCASIONAL DIALOGUE AND COMMON ACTION, AND THROUGH CONSTANT INTEREST IN OUR SEPARATED OR DISTANT BROTHERS.**

*Questions:* What interest do we take in those of our Spiritan brothers directly engaged in this ministry? Is there any hope that others will join them and continue this prophetic presence, preparing the way of the Lord? Is our community sufficiently informed about those who do not share our faith? How is its witness perceived?

**THE COMMUNITY CARRIES OUT ITS MISSION AND LEADS ITS LIFE ACCORDING TO A COMMUNITY PROJECT WHICH IS REGULARLY REVIEWED.**

*Questions:* Have we got a community project? Does it include the objectives of the different kinds of apostolate in which we are engaged, and the life style we set ourselves, through reflection, prayer, meetings, and fraternal charity? Is this project accepted by everyone? Is it subject to occasional updating? (See p. 97).

**THE COMMUNITY TAKES CARE TO HOLD REGULAR MEETINGS, WHICH ARE INDISPENSABLE FOR DISCERNING GOD'S WILL FOR IT, FOR ORGANIZING ITS INTERNAL LIFE, AND FOR PLANNING AND ASSESSING ITS ACTIVITIES AND PROPOSED ACTIVITIES.**

*Questions:* What is the style of these community meetings and the interest in them? Is the group animator sufficiently skilled for the job? What practical measures have been adopted to ensure their effectiveness?

**THE COMMUNITY PLANS ITS APOSTOLIC ACTIVITY AND MAKES OUT A PROGRAMME FOR ITS IMPLEMENTATION.**

*Question:* What are the apostolic priorities of the community? Of the Province or District? In view of what end and according to what criteria? Is the apostolic work distributed wisely among the members of the community? Is it subject to periodical assessment?

**THE COMMUNITY USES DISCERNMENT AS THE PREFERRED MEANS OF ARRIVING AT ORIENTATIONS AND DECISIONS AND OF SETTLING CONFLICTS.**

*Questions:* Before deciding, does the community take time to reflect and pray? With a fraternal exchange of views and honest confrontation?

**THE COMMUNITY REGULARLY STUDIES THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES.**

*Questions:* Is the community sufficiently informed about the broad trends of thought today concerning Mission, the Church and the world? Does it allow itself to be challenged by them?

**THE COMMUNITY FLOURISHES THROUGH THE MUTUAL ESTEEM AND AFFECTION OF ITS MEMBERS AND BUILDS ITSELF UP BY MEANS OF DEEP INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS, BASED ON GENUINE CHARITY.**

*Questions:* How deep is the level of interpersonal relations in our community? Do we live there with joy, simplicity, affection and mutual confidence? Is each one accepted and loved for what he is?

**THE COMMUNITY ENSURES ITS OWN GROWTH AND THE GROWTH OF EACH OF ITS MEMBERS THROUGH THE PARTICIPATION OF EVERYONE IN ITS LIFE AND WORK AND THE SHARING OUT OF RESPONSIBILITIES.**

*Questions:* What is it like in our community? Do all participate, or are there some who merely carry out the decisions of others? What does the community expect from the superior, and what does he expect from the community?

**THE COMMUNITY EXPERIENCES THE MYSTERY OF THE CROSS AND OF RECONCILIATION.**

*Questions:* Does our community go through moments of crisis, tension and conflict? Is it able to see in those moments a participation in the mystery of the Cross? How does it encourage reconciliation? (See *Spiritans Today* n° 2, p. 55).

**THE BEST WITNESS THAT SPIRITAN COMMUNITY COULD GIVE AND LEAVE AS A LEGACY TO THE LOCAL CHURCHES IS THAT OF ITS OWN CHARISM, COMPOSED OF FRATERNAL LIVING, SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE AND APOSTOLIC ZEAL.**

*Questions:* Is our charism perceived and appreciated by those around us? Are we requested to make it known? What kind of influence do we have as a community? How can we come to know better the charism of our Spiritan community, so as to be able to live it better?



**SPIRITAN COMMUNITY, FOR THE SAKE OF THE MISSION, MAY BE LINKED TO OTHER RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES, OR TO BASIC ECCLESIAL COMMUNITIES, OR TO MIXED APOSTOLIC TEAMS, WITH WHICH IT SHARES THE RICHNESS OF ITS SPECIFIC CHARISM AND SPIRIT.**

*Questions:* If this is the situation of my community, how is our immersion in the missionary milieu along with the other apostolic workers to be facilitated, while not neglecting the vitality of our Spiritan community? Considering the significant number of confreres concerned, should not this be the subject of lengthy discussion in the Chapters of districts where it is a necessity?

**IN THE PERSON OF ITS SUPERIOR, THE COMMUNITY HAS A GUIDE WHO HELPS IT TO REMAIN FAITHFUL TO ITS APOSTOLIC VOCATION, AN ANIMATOR WHO ENCOURAGES THE PARTICIPATION OF EVERYONE IN THE COMMON RESPONSIBILITY, A WITNESS TO THE LOVE OF CHRIST FOR HIS OWN, WHO EXERCISES AUTHORITY IN A SPIRIT OF SERVICE, AND A LINK WITH THE LARGER SPIRITAN COMMUNITY OF THE WHOLE CIRCUMSCRIPTION.**

*Questions:* How is the role of the superior seen in our community? Do we live obedience in a spirit of availability to the will of the Father, following the example of Jesus? Are we ready to give up our personal plans if they are not in line with the community project or the decision of superiors? Are we willing to help superiors in their task, giving them our esteem and affection, and accepting genuine coresponsibility? Is there any provision for training for this ministry of superior?

**THE COMMUNITY ENSURES THE ONGOING FORMATION OF ITS MEMBERS.**

*Questions:* Who are those who could profit by it in our community? How does the community respond to the ever new needs presented to it? What impact do the visits of Major Superiors have on it with regard to improving its performance in the carrying out of its mis-

sion? What provision is made for confreres who have to change their ministry or retire?

**THE CONGREGATION ENSURES THAT THERE IS A CONCRETE POSSIBILITY OF A GENUINE COMMUNITY LIFE FOR ALL SPIRITANS, PARTICULARLY BY MEANS OF THE REGIONAL COMMUNITY.**

*Questions:* In the circumscription how many confreres are living alone? How many are living with religious of other Institutes or with diocesan clergy? To what extent can they be integrated into a regional community? To what extent do they feel themselves part of such a community? Do regional communities guarantee genuine Spiritan community life as clearly defined in the N° 32.2 of the Spiritan Rule of Life? What part does the necessity for all to live in community play in the policy of the Major Superiors? (See p. 95)

This last question is particularly important today. The future of the Spiritan Community Life is going to depend, in part, upon the effort put into the organising of *Regional Communities* in those places that Mission makes it inevitable Local Communities cannot operate, places Spiritans are alone or are in community with non-Spiritans. The stipulation remains: provided there be *genuine Community life* to inspire and guide: regular meetings, a Superior, common prayer, common discernment of apostolic works, pastoral and spiritual resourcement, the shared partaking in free time and in what is common property. . . Here we have the great challenge of the new Rule of Life!

## CONCLUSION

The practice of community life in the perfection indicated above is certainly linked to the conversion of individual persons, but the spiritual renewal which marks our time gives many examples of the need and the efficacy of the conversion of the apostolic community as a community. That is why we now put forward a certain number of concrete instruments, which may help to set in motion a genuine community renewal.

# INSTRUMENTS FOR COMMUNITY RENEWAL

*N.B. Please excuse this piecemeal presentation, which is intended to make it easier for various cultures to use those procedures it finds most apt or to alter them. The numbering will help reference in discussion of any particular idea.*

## I – IN VIEW OF THE APOSTOLATE

As Spiritan Community is essentially *apostolic community*, living in a certain human milieu and at its service, certain instruments for analysing and understanding the needs of that milieu help us to understand better our apostolate as a community, and consequently help us to understand and live in a more fruitful way our Spiritan community life. Here are three examples of such instruments.

### 1. “PLANNING THE APOSTOLATE” COMMUNITY RETREAT

#### 1.1. *Content*

*First Step:* a reading of the signs of the times to discover the areas in which the Spirit is asking for the conversion of the Church today, so that it may be more faithful in its activity both to God and to people.

*Second Step:* a confrontation of our lives with the Gospel and with the Church to bring about a conversion of personal and community attitudes, so that we may be more faithful to God and to people in the world of today.

*Third Step:* a consequent choice of concrete priorities in apostolic activity and community programming to respond better to the call of God and the needs of men.

### 1.2. *Kind*

A closed, community retreat, which gives preference to dialogue and discussion in the Spirit about experience of life in the Church, over the individual prayer and silence of the classical retreat.

### 1.3. *Participants*

This kind of retreat requires several small groups of from 6 to 8 persons and consequently is most suitable for a Province, a District, or a group of local or regional communities. It is important that the general body of confreres participate in it, and to achieve this it should be given several times if necessary, within a fairly limited time scale.

### 1.4. *Frequency*

- every 5 years?
- at the beginning of a period of great change.

### 1.5. *Implementation*

Call upon an experienced animator.

Confreres can be trained to help in the smoother running of these retreats.

Length: from 8 to 10 full days.

### 1.6. *Expected Results*

- new attitudes developed by all the participants towards the world and the Church.
- agreement on apostolic priorities.
- initiation into several instruments and methods to be seen below.

### 1.7. *Note*

The first step of this retreat is given at length in Instrument 2: "Reading the Signs of the Times" (p. 63).



## 2. "READING THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES"

- 2.1. The present theology of the signs of the times involves a method which is becoming standard in the practice of the Church.

*The four steps:*

A. *The first step* is a general analysis of the historical situation and a discovery of the challenges which this involves.

This analysis should be carried out as a form of community research and should take in all aspects of life, political as well as economic, cultural and religious. It consists in looking at the realities together, mutually informing one another, with sympathy and benevolence, and without moralizing judgements. It presupposes a certain intellectual rigour and a concern to avoid ideological or sentimental polarization.

The analysis of the events leads to the formation of a comprehensive vision, placing the minor facts within a general framework while avoiding hasty generalizations. It leads finally to a clarification of the aspirations of people and of the tendencies of the present moment, and to an inventory of the principal problems of the society in which we live.

*The Process of the First Step in Detail:*

1) A description of the situation, emphasizing the FACTS which characterize it.

2) A description of the EVENTS with their different components. The events are groupings of facts pointing towards a certain future that is already in preparation, and about which there is already a certain awareness that is becoming more and more widespread (tendencies and aspirations).

3) An analysis of the historical antecedents or of the CAUSES which have led to these events.

4) An analysis of the foreseeable REPERCUSSIONS of these events on human situations.

5) An analysis of the problematic, of the situations of conflict or of the CHALLENGES that these events present to people's consciences.

B. *The second step* is an examination in the light of faith of the situation just analysed.

We are convinced that the Word of God is addressed to us in our community discussions and that it always has a particular and local significance. This presupposes a reading of the Bible which is neither naive nor fundamentalist, but open to the great ecclesial tradition and directed towards the future. The Bible throws light on our human problems of today. It questions us in our concrete situations and tendencies, it meets us at the heart of the challenges thrown down to us.

C. *The third step* is a judgement concerning the situation seen in the light of faith.

Meditation on the Word of God has provided us with criteria which oblige us to condemn certain aspects of our present life and so calls us to conversion. It also drives us to proclaim certain values particularly pertinent to today and which have to be promoted in response to God's call in our times.

D. *The fourth step* consists in drawing the conclusions from the process followed by defining the options.

The reading of the signs of the times is not a simple intellectual exercise. It is essentially a stand taken with a view to action. It is a creative force, it drives us to renewal, it calls for prophetic gestures towards constructing the future. And so it concludes with a commitment to live according to certain options.

## 2.2 *Kind*

The reading of the signs of the times may constitute the first step of a "Planning the Apostolate" Community Retreat (cf. Instrument 1 above).

It may be the subject of a special session, but on condition that all the steps are observed, especially those of conversion (second and third) and of commitment (fourth).

## 2.3. *Participants*

The reading of the signs of the times can be done, following this method, at the level of a country, of a Province, of a District, of a Diocese, of a Deanery, of a Regional Community...

## 2.4. *Implementation*

Call upon an experienced animator or on someone who has already used this method.

Confreres may be trained to help in the smoother running of this session. A sociologist may be called upon for the first step, or to prepare the first step, but the reading of the signs of the times is not a simple sociological study (even of religious sociology).

## 2.5. *Frequency*

- every 5 years?
- at a period of great change.
- when new establishments are being prepared or set up.
- when new confreres are being introduced into the community.

## 2.6. *Expected Results*

- Going beyond a moralistic or ideological vision of reality.
- Acquiring a faith vision and a contemplative attitude towards history.
- Overcoming the risk of supernaturalism and of taking refuge in prayer, so that realistic commitments in constructing the future are taken on.
- Learning to discover God's will with regard to our own development and that of humanity for the renewal of the world.
- Developing a consciousness of the Church's mission to change the world and to promote an apostolate of hope.
- Learning to face up to the changes that mark our times.

## 2.7. *Note*

This method demands:

- intellectual and moral honesty;
- study, prayer and meditation;
- a contemplative attitude, critical reflection, serious and objective analysis;
- a feeling of solidarity with the Church and with society;
- when faced with the reality, a wish to save and not to condemn;

– one's own personal commitment first, before proposing that others should commit themselves.

### 3. A METHOD OF PLANNING AND PROGRAMMING

3.1. Here are the principal steps of a (much simplified) method of planning and programming:

A. *The first step* is to single out the *fundamental problem* which here and now marks the life of the Church and of the people of the area. To this end, the following stages are gone through:

1. Developing awareness of a situation of unease, frustration or suffering.

2. Establishing a list of the constitutive levels of the reality under consideration.

3. Discovering

- the problems which affect each of these levels;
- the fundamental problem which affects each level;
- the fundamental problem which affects the whole of the reality.

*Note:* The *Fundamental Problem* is that problem which underlies all the others, and which, judiciously tackled, leads to a reversal of the situation.

B. *The second step* is to *imagine a solution*.

1. Imagine a solution in keeping with a reading of the signs of the times, and possibly in keeping with the priorities of the local Church or of the Congregation or of the Province, etc.

2. Weigh the requirements of this solution.

3. Weigh the advantages it offers.

C. *The third step* is to establish a *plan of action*.

In the light of the envisaged solution:

1. Pick out the elements of the reality which will determine the future.

2. Tease out possible guidelines for action and the foreseeable consequences of their possible implementation.



### 3. Discover

- the obstacles they will encounter in being put into practice,
- the potentialities of these obstacles,
- the resources available for their implementation.

4. Decide on the objectives (*Objective*: a new situation that the community as such commits itself to creating, a transformation that it intends to bring about around itself in the Church or the social environment).

(i) Fix the general objective or objectives, which take in the whole of the reality to be transformed.

(ii) Fix the specific objectives, which translate the general objective to the different levels of the reality, causing all its elements to converge towards the achievement of the general objective.

(iii) Arrange the stages, the steps to be taken to reach the general and specific objectives.

D. *The fourth step is to programme the action.*

1. Set up and make use of the required structures.
2. Foresee the "actions" needed for the achievement of the first stage.
3. Programme these "actions" according to the following schema:
  - what you want to achieve (WHAT).
  - the justification for what you want to achieve (WHY).
  - how you are going to achieve it (HOW).
  - who is responsible for the "actions" as a whole and for its different elements (WHO).
  - where should the "action" take place (WHERE).
  - when should the action take place (WHEN).
  - means or instruments to be used (if they already exist) or created.

E. *The fifth step is assessment, successively*

- after each "action",
- at the date set down as a deadline for the first stage,
- at the end of the pastoral year.

### 3.2 *Kind*

Community reflection.

### 3.3 *Participants*

Local or Regional Community; Province or District; Parish or Diocese.

### 3.4 *Implementation*

- The community such as it is, as far as possible, with or in understanding with the local Church.

- Call upon an experienced animator: few of us are used to this modern kind of work; this method is very exacting; it may serve however to inspire.

(The ideal would be that one confrere in each Province or District would be trained in this method of planning and programmation).

It is one of the areas of on-going formation, and could be a service to the local Church.

### 3.5. *Frequency*

Working together for the achievement of objectives is a habit to be acquired.

### 3.6. *Expected Results*

- The establishment of a dynamic over-all pastoral plan.
- The unification of a community in spite of a diversity of apostolates.
- The strengthening of regional communities in spite of geographical dispersion.
- The development of participation and co-responsibility.
- Better insertion into the local Church.

### 3.7. *Note*

The use of this method pre-supposes that the reading of the signs of the times has already been done.

## II - INSTRUMENTS FOR COMMUNICATION

Community life is built up when the members engage in open communication with one another. Everyone knows what is going on in the community. This is a primary condition for participation and co-responsibility. Communication makes community, it is said. Here are some ideas about circulating information in a community.

### 4. THE MEANS OF INFORMATION

- 4.1. Information can assume the form of the written word, of the oral word, of the audio-visual. Information can be a matter for the mass media, or for the means at the disposal of a community. Thus we arrive at the following framework:

MASS MEDIA		
<i>Written</i>	<i>Oral</i>	<i>Audio-visual</i>
Specialized Press	Radio	Television
Reviews	Tapes	Cinema
Picked Books	Records	Video-cassette
Documents	Documentaries	

COMMUNITY MEDIA		
<i>Written</i>	<i>Oral</i>	<i>Audio-visual</i>
Newsletter → Report	Lectures	Films
Circular →	Interviews	Slides
Communiqué	Meetings	Drawings
Letters	Information meetings	
Leaflets	Discussion meetings	
Expositions		

#### 4.2. *Kind*

A grid of choices that takes into account the various aspects of information and communication.

#### 4.3. *Users*

Usable by everyone.

#### 4.4. *Frequency*

As the need arises.

#### 4.5. *Implementation*

- The community itself chooses the sources and means of information (both for giving and receiving information).
- Superiors who want to be informed or to inform, see to it.

#### 4.6. *Expected Results*

This grid, if on top of everything you remember it, is a stimulant in choosing the best means of information and communication for the purpose you have in mind.

#### 4.7. *Note on the choice of forms of communication:*

- The *oral form* has the advantages of being more lively, more human, more influential, because of accompanying gestures, tone of voice, etc.

But it also has some inconveniences:

- the spoken word cannot always say everything;
- it can say more than we intended or something entirely different;
- the words, with their "aura", do not always mean the same thing to everyone.

- The *written form* is advantageous

- when its recipients are far away or absent;
- when the information aims at having a lasting effect (rule of life, long term objectives, etc.
- when, because of the complexity of the thinking, a help to the memory is required.



## 5. THE NETWORKS OF COMMUNICATION

15.1. Communication, information, functions along two principal lines, and in two different directions for each of them:

- along the vertical line
  - from top to bottom
  - from bottom to top
- along the horizontal line
  - from left to right
  - from right to left.

*From the superior authority towards the base:*

- a) I, as the one in charge,
- What information do I expect to be given?
  - To whom will I go to get it (responsibilities and talents in the area under consideration)?
  - How can I best use these capabilities and talents?

b) I, as the one in charge, whom am I going to inform?

- the community as a whole?
- a sub-group or a team?
- the members individually?
- collaborators?
- functionaries?
- higher authorities?

*From the base towards the superior authority:*

- a) I, member of the community,
- What information can I offer?
  - What capabilities and talents can I offer?
  - How can I best use these capabilities and talents?

b) I, from the base, whom am I going to inform?

- the authorities in the community?
- the community as a whole?
- higher authorities?

*Between persons situated on the same level,  
Between a community and its members,  
Between different communities:*

(i) With what is the information concerned?

- Situations
- Events

- Changes (going on, completed, expected).
- *Projects*: personal  
community
  - decisions,
  - criteria for the decisions and choices,
  - the intentions which inspire them.
- *Persons*
  - Character,
  - Life and experience,
  - Family,
  - Aspirations,
  - Capabilities,
  - Type of behaviour...
- (ii) How is the information to be conveyed?
  - Through the mass media?
  - Through the means available in the community?
  - In what form? Written?  
Oral?  
Audio-visual?
  - Where?
  - When?

## 5.2. *Kind*

A reference grid.

## 5.3. *Users*

Communities and members of communities.

## 5.4. *Frequency*

Above all when it is a matter that involves the mission of the community, the common good of the community, of the Province, etc., or of the Congregation.

## 5.5. *Implementation*

- Each one should welcome all really useful information as a service rendered to him, and should prepare with clarity and objectivity the information he wishes to communicate.

- Information destined for the community as such, or given by the community as such, requires a welcome by all and a preparation by all.

- In a matter of information or communication, the question is not one of merely knowing the content clearly and objectively, but also of passing it on; it follows that the pedagogical gifts of the members of the community should be made use of.

### 5.6. *Expected Results*

(i) Communications, above all the horizontal ones, by their number and quality, are capable of giving life to a community.

(ii) Information or any communication addressed to a person (on a personal level)

- enhances the worth of that person,
- involves him,
- calls him into question,
- opens the road to dialogue.

(iii) Information or any communication addressed to a whole group (on a general level)

- unites the community,
- increases its cohesion,
- motivates it as a community.

## III - ASSESSMENT OF PARTICIPATION, LISTENING AND RE-ACTING IN COMMUNITY

If communication is to be genuine and lead to a growth in community life, there must be active participation and active listening on everyone's part and we must learn to control our emotional reactions. Here are some aids for the improvement of these aspects of community life.

## 6. THE RESPONSIBILITY OF MEMBERS IN THE LIFE OF THEIR COMMUNITY

### 6.1. *Guidelines*

In the life of my community and, especially, when taking part in meetings, I should:

- (i) Cooperate, follow directives, and accept the instructions of those in charge, and that willingly.
- (ii) Respect the other members of the community:
  - Be attentive to what is said by EACH of them.
  - Have an attitude of ACTIVE LISTENING:
    - an attentive expression,
    - a physical attitude expressing interest.
  - Make it easy for the following to express themselves and finish what they are saying:
    - those I would like to contradict,
    - those who are shy or slow,
    - newcomers;
  - Reflect on what has been said and analyse it according to
    - the ends that the community has set itself,
    - the interests and motivations of the speakers,
    - my own points of view.
  - Take notes so that my interventions take account of what has already been said by others.
- (iii) Integrate myself completely into the life of the community:
  - Cooperate actively in defining the ends and the means,
  - Respect the decisions taken and complete my part of the work,
  - Prepare my interventions that they may be clear and concise.
- (iv) Put my abilities, gifts and qualities at the service of all:
  - show myself cooperative from the beginning without taking up an attitude of neutral observer;
  - listen, ask questions, ask for remarks to be repeated.
- (v) Not drag down the meeting with my bad humour, my worries or preoccupations. Be sufficiently master of myself to prevent my unfavourable mental states from influencing the community.
- (vi) Be myself, joyfully and calmly, while allowing myself to be challenged.



## 6.2. *Kind*

Help to self-education for community living.

## 6.3. *Users*

Everyone.

To be recalled from time to time by animators and superiors.

## 6.4. *Expected Results*

- A better participation by all.
- A mutual enrichment because of the ease with which everyone can express himself.
- The possibility for each to examine his commitment to the community.

## 6.5. *Note*

The animator needs to ask himself:

- To what extent do I encourage EVERYONE to speak and to listen? To what extent do I see that everyone's contribution is taken into account?
- Do I help those who are silent or slow or shy to express themselves and to act?
- Are there not some members or sub-groups who remain on the margin of community life?

# 7. LEARNING TO LISTEN

## 7.1. *Guidelines*

- (i) Adopt an attitude and a physical position of active interest.
- (ii) Look at the speaker.
- (iii) Try to be objective and to silence prejudices, feelings. . .
- (iv) Imagine yourself in the speaker's position, place yourself in his shoes.
- (v) Try and get hold of the idea of the person making the intervention:

- pick out the principal ideas,
- summarize them (take notes),
- distinguish the essential from the details,
- pick out the connections between the different parts of his intervention.

(vi) Discover the purpose of his intervention.

(vii) React to what he says in three stages:

- understand objectively and re-express what has been said to verify that your understanding is correct.
- by discussion discover other reactions in the community, ask those who remain silent what they think.
- compare what has been said with my own feelings, conviction and knowledge.

(viii) Learn how to judge:

- Distinguish controllable facts from personal opinions.
- grasp the difference between certain absolutes pronounced: "always", "never", "everyone", and more nuanced expressions, such as "in my opinion" and "I have the impression".

(ix) Ask yourself if the intervention is effective and sticks to realities, or is in the abstract, up in the air.

(x) To intervene:

- reconstitute the plan of the intervention
- link the interventions to your pre-occupations and to those of the community,
- speak so that the community may make progress towards the objective of the meeting.

## 7.2. *Users*

Everyone.

## 7.3. *Expected Results*

- An apprenticeship in active and intelligent listening.

## 7.4. *Note*

The animator, the superior, everyone could ask themselves these questions:

- is my listening encouraging for the community?
- what is the degree of listening in the community? Why?

- is it not the case that my responses and reactions are too rapid? too strongly affirmed?

## 8. ASSESSMENT OF THE ATTITUDES OF THE MEMBERS OF THE COMMUNITY

### 8.1. *Grid*

- Exaggerated emotional reactions to criticism or rejection of personal opinions?
- During the meetings, easily distracted, fatigued, given to day-dreams?
- Anxious and upset when the tone rises and tensions appear?
- A need for approval, for moral support, felt at the moment of intervening?
- Upset or disproportionate emotional reaction if the theses defended from the beginning are not then accepted?
- Other observations.

### 8.2. *Kind*

Reference grid.  
Community examination.

### 8.3. *Users*

Superiors, those in charge, members of the community.

### 8.4. *Frequency*

A community meeting from time to time (outside periods of tension).

### 8.5. *Expected Results*

- A better control of emotional reactions
- A clearer understanding by each one of himself.

### 8.6. *Note*

The superior has to justify recourse to this examination and to this grid of questions.

## IV – DISCERNMENT

Discernment of God's will for the life and work of the community is obviously of great importance. Here are some instruments to help in this discernment, when important decisions are to be made and when the state of health of community life is to be assessed.

### 9. COMMUNITY DISCERNMENT

9.1. Discernment in the Spirit consists in a process of interior purification with a view to choosing according to the will of God, here and now, and with the greatest possible freedom.

The process of discernment is carried out as follows:

- faced with a problem or a particular situation, consider what are the possible options or the hypotheses for a solution;
- assess these options or hypotheses in the light of the mission to be carried out by the group and express a preferential option;
- purify personal motivations;
- take a decision.

#### STEPS IN DISCERNMENT

##### *A. First Step: Analysis of the Situation*

(i) Collect all the given facts which make up the situation, specify each of the components, and thus arrive at the most objective view possible of the situation, avoiding the risk of sentimentality or bias.

(ii) Compare and contrast the components and discover the nub of the problem to be resolved, the heart of the matter where the difficulties are focused.



(iii) Look for and clarify possible solutions. At this stage coming down in favour of one or other solution must be avoided, and nothing is to be rejected a priori.

### *B. Second Step: The Preferential Option*

(i) Assess each alternative, in the light of some basic criteria (our fundamental options, the real possibility of carrying it through, the consequences it may have...). Make out a list of reasons for and against each solution.

(ii) All the alternatives (with reasons for and against) having been examined, an effort is made to be guided only by upright motives in choosing what seems best for the common good.

(iii) Analyse the preferential option and the ways of putting it into practice. Form it into a plan, specifying the means to be employed.

### *C. Third Step: The Final Decision*

(i) Confirm that the process has been followed with inner freedom.

(ii) The final decision is taken with full consciousness of what it involves and in full freedom.

(iii) The commitment undertaken is celebrated.

(iv) After a certain time (fairly long), the choice is assessed and confirmed, taking into account new elements that may have appeared.

## *9.2. Kind*

According to choice:

(i) One or several community meetings, according to the importance and the difficulty of the decision to be made, and in order to ensure the greatest possible freedom for everyone.

(ii) A recollection.

## *9.3. Users*

- a local or regional community.
- a Community, Provincial or District Council, etc.
- a work team...

#### 9.4. *Conditions for Implementation*

No particular difficulty.

To protect everyone's freedom it might be desirable to have an outsider to the community present as councillor, animator, or simple witness.

#### 9.5 *Frequency of Use*

Every time that an important and difficult decision has to be made.

#### 9.6. *Expected Results*

- Development of the capacity to analyse and synthesize and to be objective in making decisions.
- Taking on one's responsibilities (rather than simply going along with the decisions of others).
- The acquisition of a practical judgement, overcoming indecision and paralysing perplexity.
- The development of realism in the movement towards commitment, eschewing dreams, "should have"s, "all that can be done is. . .", and a perfectionism that inhibits all possibility of decision.
- Education for freedom and coherence in life.

#### - 9.7. *Note*

(i) This method can be used on a personal basis (and not just as a community).

(ii) Requirements for implementation:

- reflection and analysis, love of the truth, acceptance of the whole reality such as it is.
- humility in accepting one's limitations and those of others.
- confidence in the activity of the Holy Spirit who is at the heart of events.
- Interior freedom and a spirit of self-sacrifice.

(iii) It is necessary to specify the concrete procedures which will allow the various steps to be put into practice, such as:

- meeting(s),
- information,
- situating the problem,
- exchanges,

- time for reflection and prayer,
- etc.

and to put in writing whatever is worked out as the process goes on (especially if it extends over a fairly long time).

## 10. A REVIEW OF COMMUNITY LIFE

### 10.1. *Objective*

The purpose of a review of community life is an assessment of the internal life of the community in the light of the Gospel that will lead to mutual help in growing as an evangelical community.

It is not:

- group psychotherapy or group dynamics;
- an explosive release of tensions inside the community.

It is:

a check made by the community, gathered in the name of Jesus and in the light of the truth and the good that he puts forward, on the way that it is living its community commitment.

### *Process*

The object here is the life itself of the community, and not a fact of life taken from outside the community; if it comes from outside, the review is concerned with the manner in which the community re-acts to this fact. The concern is with situations lived actually and in reality by the community and not with persons; avoid at all costs allowing the review to turn into a judgement on certain persons.

The "facts" in question concern the behaviour of the community with regard to common values: prayer, poverty, fraternity, hospitality, timetables...

### FIRST STAGE: SEE

- (i) Find an animator.
- (ii) Put forward different community situations that are then confronted with the Gospel. The personal behaviour of any one member of the community is not in question.

- (iii) Choose one of these situations as the subject for review.
- (iv) Explain this situation in an objective and detailed manner.
- (v) Analyse the historic causes and the latent reasons (motivations, aspirations, desires, values sought or refused . . .) and the consequences of this situation for the community.

#### SECOND STAGE: JUDGE

- (i) Find the experience of Jesus and his teaching that may throw light on the situation.
- (ii) In the light of the Gospel examine the lived attitudes of the community, and from this deduce what must be given up and what must be adopted as suitable behaviour.

#### THIRD STAGE: ACT

- (i) Try to define what the community should do now and in similar situations.
- (ii) Conclude with a commitment by the community: a concrete decision that can be assessed at the end of a fixed period decided upon. If possible, conclude with a Eucharistic celebration.

### 10.2. *Kind*

Community reflection and prayer.  
Community recollection or day of intense prayer.

### 10.3. *Participants*

- A local community with a fair number of members (4 to 8 persons).
- A regional community.
- A meeting of Spiritans.



#### 10.4. *Implementation*

This form of dialogue in the Spirit does not present any particular difficulty, as long as care is taken to avoid the risk of judging particular persons.

The choice of animator is fairly important.

#### 10.5. *Frequency*

This method should not be used too frequently to avoid the community turning in on itself.

Avoid using it when the community is passing through a crisis or a period of serious tension.

#### 10.6. *Expected Results*

- Development of co-responsibility by all, thus helping the community to grow as a community.

- A means of expressing community holiness and putting it into practice.

- A means of experiencing complementarity of persons in the community: each one lives the same evangelical values in an original way, and therefore can be enriched by the way others live.

- An apprenticeship in listening deeply to others, and a deepening of respect and esteem for them.

#### 10.7. *Note*

- The use of this review of community life pre-supposes that the community has been trained in dialogue.

- Requirements:

- Desire of the community to live the Gospel down to its final consequences.

- A climate of prayer disposing hearts to a growth of the community in Christ.

## 11. THE MORALE OF A COMMUNITY

11.1. The factors which determine the morale of a community are:

### *Positive*

1. The good functioning of affective interpersonal relations.
2. The good functioning of relations with authority.
3. Confidence in being able to attain the community's objectives (for example, in view of what has already been achieved).
4. A spirit of cooperation and participation.
5. Strengthening of solidarity in the face of external constraints and pressures.
6. A joyful ambiance (the community attracts. . .).
7. Maturity of the community, the members being capable of reflection on their problems, and of analysing external attacks.

### *Negative*

1. The injection of mistrust between persons (insinuations, suspicions, jealousy. . .).
2. The injection of mistrusts of authority. Those in charge are suspected of deserting the community, of serving their own interests, of having a hidden agenda.
3. Injection of despair of ever attaining the objectives (obstacles considered as insurmountable, discouraged by failure, the means in actual use by the community discredited. . .).
4. Attempts at splitting up the community (the creation of informal sub-groups).
5. Intensification of pressure groups, increasing participation in other groups on the part of certain members.
6. Disruption of community meetings (threats, uproar, disturbances).
7. Injection of false information, alarming rumours, a poisoning of the atmosphere.

### 11.2. *Kind*

A grid to be used for discernment.

### 11.3. *Users*

Superiors and those in charge of communities.

### 11.4. *Frequency*

- On the occasion of visits of Major Superiors.
- When serious assessment is called for.

### 11.5. *Implementation*

Superiors, animators and those in charge may question themselves by means of this grid and have the community reflect on the different points which it raises.

### 11.6. *Expected Results*

- Facility in assessing the community's possibilities for action.
- Better grasp of the fears, the setbacks, the tensions. . .
- An approach to the fundamental problem of the community and of the response to be envisaged.

### 11.7. *Note*

This list can be completed and clarified by turning to the list in the next item, no. 12.

## 12. THE HEALTH AND SICKNESS OF A COMMUNITY

### 12.1 *A community is sick*

### *A community is in good health*

#### *A. In community reflection: tolerance and acceptance*

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Only some members express their opinions spontaneously, but find it difficult to speak about their feelings or their projects.</li> <li>2. The members pay little attention to what others propose and spend their time objecting or defending themselves.</li> <li>3. Unimportant points are discussed at length, while concrete decisions are avoided, or they are taken at great speed, or they are sent back to a commission.</li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. All members say willingly what they think, feel, or plan.</li> <li>2. The members listen and really understand what others propose (they are capable of repeating what has been said to them).</li> <li>3. Delicate and important opinions are discussed carefully and concretely, leaving the decisions in their area of responsibility to those in charge, if this is necessary.</li> </ol> |
|--|---|

#### *B. In decision making: objectivity and progressiveness*

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The members competent in a certain subject do not give their opinion when the subject is under discussion.</li> <li>2. The opinion of a member is judged according to the usual customs of the group, the reactions of a sub-group, or the opinions of the director of the group.</li> <li>3. In general decisions are made according to traditions, abstract theories, entrenched prejudices or fear, deriving from small-mindedness.</li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The competent members are listened to with even greater attention during the discussion of a problem.</li> <li>2. A member's opinion is welcomed and judged on its own merits, or is rejected after a genuine dialogue.</li> <li>3. It is possible for decisions to be taken that break with routine or conformity. They always flow from positive premises drawn from the principles or conclusions of the group, taking into account broad perspectives.</li> </ol> |
|---|---|



*C. In action: creativity and respect for persons*

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. New initiatives are either criticized or not upheld.</li> <li>2. A member who has failed is disqualified, reduced to silence and excluded.</li> <li>3. The group abuses certain members and uses their weaknesses to its advantage.</li> <li>4. The group strengthens its inner unity by moral pressure (e.g., threats), aggressive attitudes (creating rivalries) towards outside groups.</li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Creative new initiatives are encouraged and favoured in everything.</li> <li>2. A member who has failed in a delicate and new enterprise, is supported by the group, who understand his intentions and help him to use his resources better the next time.</li> <li>3. The group refuses to exploit the weaknesses and faults of its members.</li> <li>4. The group strengthens the participation of its members, by an exchange of impressions based on mutual understanding and sympathy, even in respect to outside groups.</li> </ol> |
|---|---|

## V. THE RELIGIOUS DIMENSION

Since our communities are *religious* communities, our community life and our inter-personal relations in community must contain a deep religious element. Here are some instruments to help us support one another by sharing religious experience, by learning to dialogue with one another on a deep level, and by overcoming tensions and sinfulness in our relations through the celebration of reconciliation.

### 13. SHARING THE WORD OF GOD

- 13.1. The Word of God, as proclaimed at the meetings of believers, is the living presence of Christ in the midst of them. When the believers welcome this Word and receive the gift Christ makes to each one, the Spirit of God draws them into unity, for they all partake of the same richness.

The shared Word is thus the sign and instrument of the communion of the believers. To share the Word is to build up the Church as communion.

*What is sharing the Word of God?*

It is neither a homily, nor a catechesis, nor a dialogue about the Word of God, nor a fraternal exhortation.

It consists in saying out loud to my brothers how I am touched by the Word of God, how it is Good News that challenges me. It is a question of sharing with the others what the Spirit is saying in the depths of my heart. So I express what I feel in listening to this Word, how it throws light on my life and can transform it, if only I believe.

*How is it to be done?*

By following these stages:

1. Agree beforehand on the text that is to be shared.
2. Pick an animator.
3. Establish an atmosphere of exterior and interior silence.
4. Read and even re-read the biblical text out loudly and slowly.
5. Allow yourself to be touched and challenged by the Word of God.
6. At the invitation of the animator, express — in complete freedom — how this Word affects and challenges you, and listen to what the Spirit tells you through the comments of the others.
7. Pray spontaneously (after listening to all those who wish to say something), each speaking briefly.
8. Conclude with a prayer of request or thanksgiving or praise (the animator's role).

### 13.2. *Kind*

Prayer and dialogue, for a part or the whole of a community meeting.

A sharing that may follow the proclamation of the Word of God in a Eucharistic celebration.

### 13.3. *Participants*

– A fairly numerous local community or a meeting of several local communities (a group of 4 to 8 or 10 members would be suitable).

- A regional community.
- An assembly of Spiritans.

#### 13.4. *Implementation*

This form of dialogue presents no difficulties.

#### 13.5. *Frequency*

No limit; simply avoid letting this form of dialogue become routine.

#### 13.6. *Expected Results*

- Enrichment of personal prayer.
- Improvement in the quality of interpersonal relations.
- Implementation of what is said about dialogue in the Rule of Life.
- Building up of the community.

#### 13.7. *Note*

- Provide sufficient time to allow everyone to express themselves.
- This form of dialogue is practised in the community retreat "Dialogue, the way to communion" (no. 15 below).
- This form of dialogue requires
  - an atmosphere of confidence and friendship
  - a sincere wish to listen to others, apart from any desire for discussion.
  - talking in the first person singular ("I" and not "we" or "one").
  - accepting times of silence and great economy in words and explanations.

## 14. SHARING LIVED EXPERIENCE

### 14.1. *What is this sharing?*

It is distinguished from sharing the Word of God in that its point of departure is not a biblical text, but a lived experience. It consists in sharing with my confreres the way in which I have lived, in such and such circumstances, a particular gospel value. So it is a form of prayer while listening to what is lived deeply by others: an encounter with God as he is present in the lives of the confreres.

It is not simply the telling of an anecdote about one's personal life, nor a discussion about certain events, nor a long discourse given for the pleasure of talking about oneself.

Sharing lived experience is, on the contrary:

- an expression by each one of the way in which, in certain circumstances, he has grown spiritually.
- the communication of a life experience in its positive elements of truth and good.
- the discovery by the community of the spiritual gifts each one has received for himself, but also for the edification of the community.
- the offer to others of a share in the same Spirit and of an enjoyment of the same presence of the Lord.

### *How is it done?*

(i) Fix in advance the theme of the sharing, keeping in mind the psychological state and the needs of the community, as well as the facility for expression of its members: all in view of allowing each one to interiorize his experiences, to analyse them, and to express them synthetically.

The theme may be centred on Gospel values, such as prayer, penance, poverty, obedience, faith, hope, a sense of God's fatherliness, communion with Christ, faithfulness to the Spirit, Mary, contemplation, the Paschal mystery, love, friendship. . .

- (ii) Provide an animator.
- (iii) Arrange a period of silence and of personal reflection.
- (iv) Read a biblical passage adapted to the theme, or make an appropriate personal reflection.
- (v) When invited by the animator, recount — in complete freedom — your life experience.
- (vi) Conclude with a prayer (animator's role).



#### 14.2. *Kind*

Prayer and dialogue, for the part or the whole of a community meeting.

#### 14.3. *Participants*

- A fairly numerous local community (from 4 to 8 persons).
- A regional community.
- A Spiritan meeting.

#### 14.4. *Implementation*

This form of dialogue presents no difficulties.

#### 14.5. *Frequency*

- Do not allow this form of dialogue to occur too frequently.
- Choose a moment favourable to recollection and peace, and be generous with the time available (during a retreat or a recollection, during a special celebration or a special time of reflection...). If it goes on too long, stop for the time being and finish it later on in the same atmosphere.

#### 14.6. *Expected Results*

- Growth of the community in communion through the discovery of the experiences of each one, of his spiritual gifts, of that which is deepest in him.
- Awareness that the Spirit is the principle of unity and diversity.
- A lived discovery of the complementarity of persons in the community: enriched by what is lived by the others.
- An apprenticeship in listening to others in depth, and a deepening of respect and esteem for others.

#### 14.7. *Note*

- (i) Take no notes during the sharing.
- (ii) Preserve complete discretion after the sharing.
- (iii) Requirements:
  - The participants know and trust one another.

- Previous practice in sharing the Word of God.
- The community is motivated.
- Freedom of expression.
- Interventions in the first person singular.
- A readiness to look at others with new eyes (above every kind of prejudice or moral judgement).

(iv) This form of dialogue is practised in the community retreat "Dialogue, the way to Communion" (No. 15 below).

## 15. "DIALOGUE, THE WAY TO COMMUNION" — A COMMUNITY RETREAT —

### 15.1. The broad outline of this community retreat:

First stage: *Awareness*

- of the necessity of dialogue, following on
  - the changes of our times and the challenges they throw up to us;
  - the nature of man and God's will for us.
- of the sociological conditions which render dialogue possible.

Second stage: *Conversion*, in the midst of a Church which wishes to be the sacrament of communion of men with God and of the communion of men among themselves: a conversion of our attitudes, when confronted with

- the difficulties of dialogue,
  - the demands which it makes on us,
- and a new openness to unity and reconciliation.

Third stage: *Commitment* of the community to dialogue, above all with those on the spot who are looking for more understanding and acceptance.

### 15.2. *Kind*

A closed community retreat. (See Encyclical "Ecclesian suam" of Paul VI, 1964, III<sup>d</sup> Part.)

### 15.3. *Participants*

It requires the possibility of forming several small groups of from 6 to 8 persons, and therefore preferably applies to a Province, to a District, or to a gathering of local or regional communities. It is impor-

tant that the confreres as a whole take part in it and that, as a consequence, the retreat should be able to be given several times if necessary, within a fairly short time scale.

It may group together Spiritans, other religious, secular priests, lay people...

#### 15.4. *Frequency*

Whenever attitudes of dialogue need to be instilled.  
It can serve as the annual retreat.

#### 15.5. *Implementation*

- Call an experienced animator.
- Some confreres may be trained to facilitate the experiment.
- Length: 6 full days.

#### 15.6. *Expected Results*

- Openness to participation and co-responsibility.
- Reconciliation when faced with conflicts and tensions.
- Improvement in interpersonal relations and mutual help in living the evangelical counsels.
- Deepening of interpersonal relations.
- Development of sharing and of periodic community meetings.

#### 15.7. *Note*

All the Christian communities (parishes, basic ecclesial communities, religious communities...) could benefit from this retreat.

It is particularly indicated that priests, male and female religious, lay people from the same parish should make this retreat together. In that case, it is advisable to adapt it so that it can be given on 6 consecutive evenings, or on 2 or 3 consecutive week-ends.

## 16. A COMMUNITY CELEBRATION OF RECONCILIATION

### 16.1. The community assembles in the chapel.

There are three periods in the celebration:

First period: *Celebration of the Word of God.*

- a hymn,
- a prayer by the president,
- proclamation of the Word of God (one or two texts; one from the gospels),
- homily.

Second period: *Celebration of reconciliation* properly so called:

- Examination of conscience in common:
  - some questions inspired by the biblical texts,
  - each question is followed
    - by a short period of silence;
    - by free personal expression (if the community agrees);
    - by a sung request for pardon.
- Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Each one may present himself freely to a priest confrere to receive absolution.

Third period: *Thanksgiving*

- a prayer or the Our Father.
- a final thanksgiving hymn (Magnificat).

It is appropriate that the celebration be followed by a fraternal meal.

### 16.2. *Kind*

A liturgical celebration and community meeting.

### 16.3. *Participants*

- A fairly large local community
- A regional community
- On the occasion of Spiritan meetings or assemblies or retreats.



#### 16.4. *Frequency*

Three or four times a year.

#### 16.4. *Implementation*

No particular difficulty

#### 16.5. *Expected Results*

- Facility in having recourse to the sacrament of Reconciliation.
- Community conversion.
- Growth of the community in charity.

#### 16.7. *Note*

This celebration can take appreciably different forms.

### VI. THE REGIONAL COMMUNITY

Since a high proportion of Spiritans are members of regional communities, the success or failure of renewal of community life in the Congregation depends to a large extent on the genuineness of the community life in these communities. Here is an instrument to help guide the organizing of regional communities in such a way that genuine Spiritan community life is promoted.

### 17. CONCRETE CONDITIONS FOR THE EXISTENCE AND LIFE OF A REGIONAL COMMUNITY

17.1. The necessary conditions would seem to be the following:

- (i) The establishment of regional communities as canonical, officially recognized communities, with a Superior, a Bursar, a Council, a Centre, a Name.
- (ii) The realization of all the conditions for the existence of a human community:

- Regular and frequent meetings (weekly, twice monthly, monthly?) and of periods of common life (3 or 4 times a year, for a few days at a time; on the occasion of the annual retreat, of the visit of the major superior, etc.).

- Taking into account the distances and the means of transport facilitating these meetings.

- Favourable localities and living conditions for the meetings.

(iii) Delegation, but by the *community*, in eventual agreement with the major superior and with the Bishop, of the confreres to the different apostolic activities in the community's care (parishes, schools, different services. . .).

(iv) Every intervention (though with possible exceptions) of the major superior or the Bishop, in their proper spheres, begins with a dialogue with the community and its superior (instead of the members of the community being addressed directly).

(v) The community chooses and takes on as a community

- values to be promoted,

- objectives to be attained,

- an organization of the community apostolate that is both participative and dynamic.

(vi) The community makes itself a centre of attraction

- by its friendly atmosphere and by its human warmth and welcome;

- by the attention it gives to each of its members;

- by effective mutual help.

(vii) Once the community has been well established, it may open out to the local clergy

- by welcoming them,

- by giving them spiritual support,

- by mutual help.

(viii) Gatherings and meetings normally involve a balanced distribution of the time available between periods of reflection and of work, of celebration and of community prayer, of relaxation.

## 17.2. *Kind*

- A reference grid for the construction of regional communities.

- Help for regional communities in the drawing up of their community project.

- Help in assessing the life of a regional community.

### 17.3. *Users*

- Major Superiors and Bishops
- Those in charge of regional communities
- The confreres concerned.

### 17.4. *Implementation*

- Major Superiors
- Those in charge of regional communities.

### 17.5. *Expected Results*

- The safe-guarding of Spiritan “specificity” in the face of the pre-occupation of bishops to maintain a minimum of pastoral control.

## VII – THE COMMUNITY PROJECT

Most of the elements of community life discussed so far are somehow drawn together and made concrete for each community and for each confrere in the community project. It gives meaning and direction to the daily life and work of the community. Without it, many ideals remain “up in the air” and much apostolic activity is haphazard. Here is an instrument to help in drawing up this project, so important for community life.

## 18. A COMMUNITY PROJECT GRID

### 18.1. *Content*

#### 1. *The mission of the community*

- (i) The OBJECTIVE of the community as such (the change that it proposes to bring about in the ecclesial or social milieu).
- (ii) The PEOPLE INTENDED to be affected in the first place by its activity.

(iii) The different works and activities of the community and how they fit in to the general objective (how they contribute to the attainment of this objective).

(iv) The means and resources that the community has at its disposal to attain its objectives.

(v) Means and instruments to be set up and resources to be found.

(vi) The distribution of tasks.

(vii) Collaborators already at work or to be found.

## 2. *Life style* (in keeping with the general objective aimed at)

### (i) Community Reflection

- times,
- themes.

### (ii) Prayer and Spiritual Life

- Celebration of the Eucharist,
- Celebration of the Office,
- Times of prayer,
- Times and places of silence,
- Celebration of reconciliation,
- Important feast days,
- Annual retreat,
- Community recollections,
- The participation of the sick in community prayer,
- The Sacrament of the Sick in community,
- The monthly celebration of the Eucharist for the confreres

who have died and for the intentions of the Superior General.

### (iii) The community time-table.

### (iv) Meetings:

- different types of meetings,
- frequency,
- length.

### (v) Fraternal life:

- Meetings,
- Holidays,
- Recreation,
- Birthdays and feasts,
- Hospitality to the families of confreres, to friends and collaborators of the community,
- Visits.



### 3. *TRAINING* (in keeping with the mission of the community)

- (i) The different levels for which training should be planned:
  - professional,
  - theological,
  - spiritual,
  - liturgical,
  - scriptural,
  - pastoral,
  - human (languages, work methods, etc.).
- (ii) Programming the training.
- (iii) Places and means:
  - in the community:
    - by the community itself,
    - by calling on experts,
  - outside the community:
    - places, length, financial means.

### 4. *Relations of the community*

- (i) with the Congregation
  - major superiors,
  - other communities.
- (ii) with the local Church.
- (iii) on the civic level.
- (iv) with the neighbourhood.

### 5. *Conduct of the community*

- (i) Superior: style of animation.
- (ii) Council.
- (iii) Sharing out of functions within the community.
- (iv) Animation of meetings.
- (v) Revision and assessment.

## 18.2. *Kind*

A grid to be adapted to the different types of communities and cultures.

18.3. *Users*

- Superiors
- Communities.

18.4. *Frequency*

A community project to be revised in the light of this grid

- every year;
- when there are changes in the membership of the community (arrivals — departures);
- when the priorities of the community are modified.

18.6. *Expected Results*

- Putting the various MAXIMS into practice. (*See Guidelines, p. 55*).
- Better understanding of the community and of its mission.
- Participation of everyone.
- Unity and harmony of community life.
- Adaptation of the Rule of Life.
- Examination by the community as such of new intuitions and propositions and their eventual adoption.

## CONCLUSION

### OUR SPIRITAN APOSTOLIC COMMUNITY

The Church is not its own end, but, as sacrament of the Incarnate Word, is "for us men and for our salvation". Similarly, for us Spiritans our community life is not just for its own sake. It is for the support and perfection of our apostolic life. It follows that the Spiritan community does not see itself as a static institution, a kind of sanctuary standing apart from history, turned in on itself and away from the world. Rather, sharing as it does in the Church's function as a sacramental sign, it strives to point beyond itself, as a sign should, and find its centre, not in itself, but in the God who loves his creation. Its attitude towards its human milieu is one of service and co-operation, rather than opposition and suspicion. It seeks to be a channel of communication between God and the world in which it lives, and so is open to both.

We Spiritans realize that the salvation in Christ which we preach is essentially communitarian, and that we cannot preach what we have not experienced. And so we try to live a truly human, Christian, and religious community life, and use whatever techniques are available to achieve this, because we realize it is an important element of our apostolic effectiveness. Coming from community, our missionary aim is to build up community in Christ wherever we are sent. And we know, too, that the witness of our community life can be an exemplar cause of the effectiveness of this mission, that the attractiveness of our community life can draw to Christ.

In the Old Testament, Israel was elected to mediate revelation to all nations, not by way of outgoing mission, but by way of attraction to Jerusalem through her witness of worship and devotion (cf. Is. 49, 6; 60, 1-4). This is sometimes called *centripetal* mission. With Jesus and the New Testament *centrifugal* mission begins. During the public ministry, Jesus confined his mission and that of his disciples to Israel, but, after the Resurrection, the apostles were sent to all nations. The Spiritan community would hope to be a centre of both centripetal and centrifugal mission, of both attracting and outgoing mission, especially

since both forms of mission complement each other, and are both necessary for the success of mission in today's world.

Our divine Patron, the Holy Spirit, has been sent from the Father by the risen Christ to unite all Christians in the community of the Church and to inspire them to missionary activity, so that their communion with one another in Christ may extend to the whole human race (cf. LG 7). Within the Church the one Spirit is the source of both community and mission, and so he is in our Spiritan communities. As the soul gives life and unity to the body, so does the Spirit give life and unity to the Christian community. And, as Christ accomplished his mission from the Father through the instrumentality of his sacred humanity, so does the Spirit accomplish his mission through the instrumentality of the Christian community, in which he dwells as animating principle. The Spiritan community would hope to be the Spirit's privileged dwelling place and his privileged instrument in the work of salvation.

Since mission is God's work and we are merely his instruments, union with him through prayer is absolutely essential, as Fr. Libermann never tired of pointing out. So, prayer is at the core of apostolic community. And it is the same Spirit, who is the source of our community life and of our mission, who is also the source of our prayer. For, true prayer rises from the Spirit dwelling in our hearts (cf. Rom. 8, 26-27). Our practical union with God in the midst of the world makes our mission, not so much a state of being busy about many things, as a style of living focussed on God, in which we live out our privilege of crying in the Spirit, "Abba!"

In our communities Mary is the Tutela Domus. She is the perfect disciple of Christ and the perfect instrument and partner of the Spirit. As Jesus was dying, she stood by the Cross and, sharing his suffering in her mother's heart, she associated herself with his sacrifice on behalf of the human race. It was at that moment that Jesus gave her as mother to his disciple, thus indicating her mission in his Church once the Spirit had come to give it life and dynamism. So, when, at Pentecost, the Spirit came in tongues of fire to send the first Christian community on mission, Mary was there, sustaining and encouraging the small, vulnerable group by her maternal presence and prayer. And she remained the apostolic heart of that young missionary community as, guided by the Spirit, they spread the Good News of Christ. Still today, as mother of our Spiritan communities, she draws us together in brotherly and reconciling love, and urges us to bring our world to Christ, her Son.









GENERALATE, C.S.Sp.  
CLIVO DI CINNA 195  
00136 ROMA